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An editorial for the writers (and readers) of America.

The Sixth Column

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WE quote from a leaflet published by the National Conference of Christians and Jews:

Who Are We of the United States?

"We of the United States are:

One-third of a million, Indian

One-third of a million, Oriental, Filipino, and Mexican.

60 million, Anglo-Saxon; 10 million, Irish

15 million, Teutonic; 9 million, Slavic

5 million, Italian; 4 million, Scandinavian

2 million, French; 13 million, Negro

1 million each, Finn, Lithuanian, Greek

In addition, we are:

2 million, Anglican Episcopalian

40 million, Evangelical Protestant

1 million, Greek Catholic

4½ million, Jew

Two-thirds of a million, Mormon

One-tenth of a million, Quaker

22 million, Roman Catholic

One-half million, Christian Scientist."

What an extraordinary invitation to racial and religious intolerance! What a magnificent opportunity to put racial and religious intolerance where it belongs—on the dump heap of prejudices destroyed by common sense! For no American can read this table of statistics without realizing that racial and religious intolerance in the United States is dynamite—guaranteed, if it explodes, to blow up everyone. If you do not know the American history of intolerance, read it, and you will learn that, from the beginning, this country has always had to combat intolerance, and that our success in achieving a workable unity has been absolutely conditioned by victory, again and again and often by the narrowest margin, in a struggle to hold down a tide of prejudice, that always rises once more, that has been thrown back, and will be thrown back once more, because, if it washes over us, we can no longer function as a nation. It makes little difference which intolerance is uppermost, or whether the cause is fear or economic jealousy or mor-

bid pride or sick self-distrust; the result will always be the same. Father Coughlin cannot attack the Jewish minority without arousing anti-Catholicism. Where the Negro is most oppressed, other prejudices flourish like narcotic weeds. If the bell of intolerance tolls for one, it tolls for all.

The record of American writers in attacking the rank superstitions preying upon American unity is excellent. But the time has come for them to adopt new tactics. We have heard so much of the sufferings of the Jew, the Negro, the Indian, the Balkan steel worker, the poor white, that we grow callous—and, what is more dangerous, defeatist. The sufferings, the injustices, are real. But they are always depicted as the sufferings of minorities. What about the majorities?

Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, with their tools of research, are not the first to discover that intolerance, in the long run, is as destructive for the intolerant as for his victim. Anti-Semitism may be an injury to the Semite, but it is a disease for the anti-Semitic. As Erskine Caldwell (and many another) has powerfully shown, the violent determination in certain communities to hold the Negro down and back has had appalling results for the whites, who, in the attempt to save white supremacy, have become decadent and slipped far below the level of white populations elsewhere. In a country made up of such elements as the table above describes, it should be clear that the Catholic, Jew, Protestant, the "old American," Greek, German, Serb, or Negro, who lets his religious or racial prejudices go uncontrolled, is taking slow poison—maybe not so slow. But is it clear?

WE doubt it, and urge the creative American writer, and his partner, the creative American reader, to cultivate this field for the imagination in which subtler dangers lurk than in Uncle Tom's cabin or the way-side camp of the migrant laborer. This great theme for America, of what happens to minds diseased by prejudice, of what happens to a complex country that lets fanatics and the too human ignorant slash at leg and arm and liver and heart in order to stop a headache, this great theme is not one on which books can be written to order. If written to order they will not be read. It is not necessary to order them; they will write themselves once the American imagination becomes aware of the dramatic danger which threatens our majorities. In this battle against the new Know Nothings, the ammunition will come from the social scientists, who have plenty in stock; but if the country is to realize what the Sixth Column in our midst is blindly trying to accomplish, it must be made to see and feel a crisis—and that is a job for literature.

Henry Seidel Canby

High Lights Of Recent Books

SHOW us gold plate of the sea kings of Crete, Ashoka's throne or the mace of Charlemagne, and some awe may mingle with our far-off curiosity. Such splendor, we think, and so long ago! That is history in its heraldic and colorful pageantry, dramatized by majestic personalities, star-crossed with tragic destinies whose tragedy we cannot really feel.

But to an American a faded flag from Saratoga is not just a relic of history, and neither is a wagon wheel from the Oregon Trail, nor an old fowling piece carried over the Wilderness Road, where Lucy Hanks carried her baby. When you say to an American: Appomattox or Yorktown, Fredericksburg or Marblehead, Fallen Timbers, Mountain Meadows, New Salem—more than pride wells up in him. Something within him hurts, as only the adventure of living can. For he does not call these thoughts and deeds history. He says, "We lived this."

Not "they lived that," but *we* lived it, and "we" means many people, not necessarily ancestral to the speaker. We may mean more than pioneer ancestors of English descent. We may refer even to

some not born American. Say, La Salle, De Soto, Marquette. They too are we, because they came here with the American dream already in their hearts before ever they left their native countries. And they died here with the gleam of it still in their eyes. La Salle's body was left upon the Texas plain, De Soto's lowered into the Father of Waters, Marquette's buried under the burr oaks and hickories of Illinois. America still holds them; their own lands scarcely claim them. So they are we.

And we, as we stare across the August shimmer of the Indian corn, at the cool trail of the river woods, feel that we see it all as they did. We feel their old unrest; we see the great high hope of the October skies, and the baffling horizon; we are always hunting some impossible Northwest Passage, and what we meet, instead, is the "shining mountains," the snowy front wall of Rockies lifting out of the old buffalo country, just as the Verenderyes, first of all white men, beheld them. And you can never hear the chuckle of lake waters at your paddle without remembering the Indians and

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"Audubon's America"

Edited by DONALD CULROSS PEATTIE

*A memorable picture of this land where our fathers died. . . .
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BLUE BOOK



JULY 1941

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Arsenal of Democracy—No. 2, "Ore Boats,"
Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

Except for stories of Real Experiences, and special features, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.



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(Continued from page 1)

feeling one with them, or the storm of the crows in a wild autumn sky, or the clash of the corn blades. So they, too, are we.

We say we built the Union Pacific, when we mean that Chinese coolies built it, starting from Sacramento, and Irish paddies built it, starting from Omaha, till they stared at each other across the Golden Spike in Mormon country. We built the *Constitution*, yes—out of Maine pine and Georgia oak, and we caulked it with North Carolina pitch and manned it with seafaring men of Massachusetts. It is not by one blood or language, one culture or religion, that we are unified. Something else than these has moulded us, in the clenching of a great palm.

And that something is America. It is the air we breathe and some horizon we see. It is the great grass plains, and the long lake waters, the arc of the sky, and the depth of the loam; it is the timber that made our cradles and musket-butts; it is the flying birds, and the herds snuffing and stamping.

These are America, as it was, as we remember it, as, in some measure, it still is. Who can say why our sky is not the same as Europe's? Why our soil is not like China's good earth, why are the prairies not the steppes? Perhaps we cannot answer, but we feel the difference in our bones. The canyons are carven deep in us, and the broad rivers run in our blood.

Not that any one of us is by the smallest fraction equal to the land we inhabit. It is America, the continent, which has been decisive in the story of Americans. It has, violent and beautiful, spacious and demanding, brought out the best and the worst in the men who came to it. To describe it is to recount our history.

And the materials of history are, in the last analysis as in the first place, the accounts of eye-witnesses. Hearsay, second-hand accounts, are not evidence. The source of history is the narratives of those who lived it. Every written word of the settlement of Virginia, the exploration of the Northwest Territory, the saga of Texas or the Santa Fe Trail, is precious to us. And anyone who could turn up the missing journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition would have American treasure.

Now of all those who ever lived here, traveled and greatly adventured, none could bear more fascinating testimony than John James Audubon. He had the advantage of being a foreigner (as Crèvecoeur and Tonti and Marquette and Lord

Bryce were foreign commentators). So that he took nothing for granted, and in the perspective of a more mature culture, all things American struck him as fresh. He had the further advantage that he was a genius, and a genius of art at that, so that to observe, to depict what he saw, was habitual and instinctive.

But Audubon had, too, a genius for the art of living. He lived with zest for the adventure, and with personal ardors. He savored everything, even the unsavory. He saw almost everything, from 1803 to 1849, from Florida to Labrador, from New York City to Fort Union on the borders of Montana. He lived among Pennsylvania Quakers, in Kentucky among pioneers from Virginia, in New Orleans among Creoles, in Mississippi among planters, in North Dakota among Indians. He explored Maine and South Carolina, Texas and Florida. He knew all types; he was the friend of Daniel Boone and Daniel Webster.

IN the nearly fifty active American years of Audubon's life what other individual had such a variety of experience? No one, certainly, who was at once so sensitive and so lusty. No one with his pen and his brush. One thinks of Mark Twain. But Clemens was a child when Audubon was old. Clemens went down the Mississippi in a gilded steamboat, as a light-hearted adventure. But Audubon made the same journey years before in a flatboat, and his life's success seemed to depend on the venture.

One thinks perhaps of Lincoln. But Lincoln left no personal narrative. Of Whitman, who certainly left plenty of self-exposition, but it was the work of an introspective, an impressionist. No one would dream of suggesting that Emerson knew his America as Audubon knew it, or that Thoreau did, or Cooper or Parkman. The only comparable character I can think of is André Michaux, a man whose nationality, adventures and gifts parallel Audubon's. Beside Audubon, Michaux is a short shadow.

Fame as an ornithologist has obscured Audubon's value as a witness to our heroic age. His painter's art has overshadowed his abilities as a writer. For besides being a detailed diarist and an inveterate correspondent, Audubon was a professional writer. He wrote to sell, and did sell. I am not saying that he knew how to write history like the learned Parkman, or style like the choice Thoreau, or that he thought as an equal with

Emerson. I am asserting only that while Cooper went to England while he wrote *The Prairie* (an unreadably dull book, to my ears), Audubon was the prairies; that where Emerson knew his Carlyle, Audubon knew his Mississippi squatters; and that while Thoreau was traveling around Concord, Audubon was traveling around North America. While Parkman was writing history, Audubon was making and witnessing it.

And yet there has never before been collected into any one volume a general selection of the first-hand narratives of this shrewd and eager observer of all conditions and aspects of American men, manners, and scenes. He is seldom even quoted save in evidence for the unbelievable numbers of the passenger pigeons, or the destruction of the buffalo, or on some other point in natural history. This is due in part to the fact that his writings have remained scattered through a wide assortment of volumes, many of them accessible only in a few great libraries. Others, notably his unaltered diaries, and journals, have but recently been published and only in limited and costly editions.

This volume is intended to make up in some measure for neglect of Audubon's precious testimony. As editor I have preferred to bring him forward less as the naturalist than as one who knew river captains and roustabouts, pioneers and men of letters, Indians and scientists. This without, of course, slighting his natural-history writings, but reducing them to some reasonable proportion to the whole. That whole is the America of his day, America as he, and perhaps only he, knew it: Audubon's America.

John James Audubon gave many accounts of his own birthplace and parentage, and the date of that birth. Any one of them might have been fairly convincing, if they were not all more or less in contradiction, except on one point. And that point is his repeated assertion and implication that he was born in the New World, the Western Hemisphere.

This should set at rest the preposterous claim that has recently (and only recently) been set up for him, that he was none other than the lost Dauphin, Louis XVII, majesty disguised as a wandering artist! This legend would be too far-fetched for notice if it were not, unfortunately, the one story about Audubon that sticks in many minds. Two women biographers of Audubon have recently taken it quite seriously, and thousands of words have been

written in debate on this point. They can all be cut short by laying down a fact denied by nobody. The unfortunate little Bourbon prince had a deformed ear, while Audubon's ears were both quite normal. Who will seriously argue the point beyond this?

All the documents in the case prove, to the satisfaction of most who have examined them, that the great bird-painter was born April 26, 1785, at the port of Les Cayes or Aux Cayes on the south coast of what is now the republic of Haiti, though it was then called by the French, who were in possession of it, Saint-Domingue. The father, Jean Audubon, was a lieutenant in the French navy, with a record of distinguished courage and ability in battle. He was a rich sugar planter, a careful and successful business man, and an owner of properties in the West Indies, France, and Pennsylvania.

But the mother of the future artist remains a mystery. She was a native of the island, a Creole of good birth. Her family name may have been either Rabin or Fougère; there is equal evidence for both, and the Fougères and Rabins were and still are distinguished families in Haiti. Probably somewhere in this woman's ancestry was the then locally well-known name of Laforest. She bore the lieutenant (so it seems in the light of latest researches) four sons, of whom Jean Jacques Audubon was the youngest.

THE infant was not, however, then called Jean Jacques Audubon, but, probably, Fougère Rabin. The reason for this was the bald fact that the seafaring planter could not marry his island love. He had a wife in France, a woman older than he, a woman of property. When the little Fougère was about one year old his mother died. Her place at the plantation was taken by another, by whom the lieutenant had a daughter, Muguet. From her mother he seems to have become separated, but the girl child remained with her father. So there, when at last he was obliged to return to France, was the sailor with a brace of tiny love-children, babes-in-the jungle who might reasonably have expected no other fate than to be abandoned there, at best to hired care.

But Jean Audubon was conscientious. He took his children back to France, in 1789, probably crossing the United States on his way, and placed them in the tender arms of his childless wife in Nantes. Five years later Lieutenant Au-

dubon legally acknowledged the paternity of "a male child, Fougeré," as well as of the small girl, and formally adopted both. . . .

The lad was brought up in Nantes and at his father's country estate down on the estuary of the Loire, and was educated irregularly in school and at home. . . . From early childhood Audubon began to draw birds. He was also a hunter, a distressingly active home taxidermist, a persistent collector of nests and a blower of eggs. But drawing birds was his passion, and rather surprisingly his father seems to have indulged and assisted this passion up to a certain point. When it seemed that natural history was interfering with the boy's serious studies, the father put him in a naval training-school. But the now caged young eagle immediately went frantic at restraint and broke free without leave. His father surrendered and sent him to Paris to study in the *atelier* of David, the best drawing-school of the day. . . .

As Lieutenant Audubon had left Haiti just in time to escape the frightful massacres of the race war that had its beginnings at Les Cayes, so now he got his son out of France just in time to escape the wholesale conscriptions of Napoleon. Young Audubon was sent to America, to his father's estate near Norristown, Pennsylvania, in 1803; and it is there and then that the curtain, for purposes of this book, really rises.

"Mill Grove," the Audubon estate, was a manor house situated in what we might call the Valley Forge country, and connected with some lead mines which the lieutenant had bought as a speculation. . . . The inhabitants, with exceptions important to Audubon, were Quakers, a peaceful and industrious lot quite without sympathy for Audubon's hobbies of shooting, music, bird-watching, drawing, and fine dress. . . . Few managed to enter the self-indulgent boy's good graces except for a fellow-hunter and landed neighbor, the Englishman William Bakewell. Calling upon him one memorable day, John James found at home only his neighbor's daughter, Lucy, and in spite of her tender years, he at once fell utterly in love with her. However he misjudged others at this time, he made no mistake about his future mate, and in the innocent and unwritten features of a girl of fifteen he read the woman aright.

But Mr. Bakewell had no intention of giving his daughter to a lad who had not yet come into his fortune, either by

inheritance or dint of effort, and the young Audubon went to France to obtain the consent and financial assistance of his father. The practical lieutenant set about planning for his son a business partnership with Ferdinand Rozier, a young merchant to whose capital Audubon *père* joined a substantial amount, which was to be his son's anticipated heritage. While his future was thus arranged for him, Jean Jacques was rambling the woods with the gifted naturalist Charles D'Orbigny, an excellent systematist who probably put into some sort of order the boy's undirected and now forbidden passion for birds. Back in New York, drudging obediently as a clerk in a business house to gain experience, he found or stole the time to work on the side in the private museum of Doctor Samuel Mitchell, where he learned taxidermy. . . .

Here, then, is the great ornithologist, the dual genius of art and science, already in the making. But this genius has just lost a handsome sum in speculation on a collapsing indigo market, and with this as the best of his preparation for business, he now (1807) sets off, in company with the solid and sober young Rozier, for Kentucky, there to open a frontier store. From now on, for eleven years, from the age of twenty-two to thirty-three, the great adventure of his youth is to be bound up with the men of the frontier, with the woods and swamps, the sparse cities, the plantations, the rivers, and above all with the wilderness bird life of that great system of waterways that is the Mississippi Basin. . . .

Rozier, and Audubon—with his bride Lucy—went into business in Louisville, Kentucky, a village of one thousand souls. . . . Not for eight years was the country to know real prosperity. Eight years is soon over, in a nation's life. In Audubon's life it was the critical period of his young manhood, and it sufficed to break him as a business man. That was precisely what had to happen before he could become an ornithologist and artist.

IT is most doubtful if the Audubon-Rozier venture, which was transferred from Louisville to Henderson in the vain hope of better trade, could have succeeded even in times of prosperity. Imagine Rozier's despair at a partner, who, with a boy to help, was supposed to tend store, and not only went birds'-nesting and generally skylarking instead, day after day and weeks on end, but took the boy with him to help him shoot, retrieve, and carry

back the ornithological specimens. True, his gun kept the table supplied with grouse, turkey, and duck. But his accounts were never in order, and what was worse, he was not made miserable by the fact. He needed and wanted, and knew how liberally to spend, money. But he seemed to think that where it came from was the business of Rozier or his father, or his father-in-law. His own was that portfolio of drawings—a wallet that never got thinner.

Indeed by the year 1810 Audubon's collection contained more than two hundred pictures. They were far inferior to the finished product of later years, but they were the nucleus of his great work, and it is important to note that they were, like the first edition of *The Birds of America*, which was issued in elephant folio dimensions, all life-size drawings, whether of eagles or titmice. This was Aubudon's unique idea, and, though it proved so difficult of realization when it came to publication, it was also one of the most novel and telling points for the sale of his book. Thus early did *The Birds of America* take shape. What hours of labor, what days and even weeks of wood rambling, what a stored wealth of field experience the drawings already represented, Lucy and Rozier could have told. "I have a rival in every bird," Lucy laughed and sighed to her sister.

Rozier, who returned Lucy's dislike, determined to strike out again, and got Audubon to go with him, leaving Lucy for the time behind. They made their way toward the old French settlement of Ste. Genevieve on the Mississippi. . . . At Ste. Genevieve Audubon and Rozier dissolved their partnership. Rozier bought Audubon's interest, and with the money Audubon returned to the store in Henderson.

In 1810 Henderson, Kentucky, was a log-cabin town eighteen years old, set in the midst of great canebrakes alive with birds and game. Here Audubon brought his little family, and the finest piece of furniture in the house, he said, was the cradle. This has been taken to mean destitution, which was not the case. There was plenty of furniture; there were Lucy's silverware and china. He merely said the cradle was the finest thing in the house. It is the finest thing in any house, as long as it is filled. When little Victor was lifted from it for the last time, it was to make room for his brother John, who, like his elder brother, was to be his father's faithful helper many years later.

At the moment he was but a source of anxious pride.

From the age of twenty-seven to thirty-five, Audubon lived at Henderson, Kentucky. Those are core years in a marriage, when early love is welded into enduring strength by the fires of living, when children are born, and sometimes lost (Lucy bore four and lost two), and dreams begotten, and tried, and go begging at any price, without believers. These years, 1812 to 1820, furnished forth materials for many of Audubon's most stirring adventures, told years later in the *Episodes of Western Life*, so liberally quoted in this book. In the telling, they sound wonderful; hardships seem in them merely to be forging our hero; mis-haps are prod to a laugh. In a backward look, such tribulations gleam like treasure.

BUT at the time, we call them those troubles that never come singly. The best of businesses failed them. Audubon failed conspicuously even in a panic. A store, a mill, a commission business, all met with lack of success. Audubon was sued, and instituted futile suits. He was reviled, attacked, sought by a mob, assaulted by a business enemy, brought to trial for defending himself, and finally taken to jail for debt. When he declared bankruptcy, the sheriff took everything, all Lucy's silver and china, his house, his furniture. Everything but his clothes and gun. Oh, yes, and his drawings, which of course would not fetch a cent; those he might keep.

Without a dollar in his pocket, he set out to walk to Louisville alone. "This," he said remembering it long after, "was the saddest of all my journeys, the only time in my life when the wild turkeys that so often crossed my path, and the thousands of lesser birds that enlivened the woods and the prairies, all looked like enemies, and I turned my eyes from them, as if I could have wished that they never existed."

Every resource was now exhausted—Lucy's patrimony, Audubon's last asset. But he hit upon the talent that was to change the course of his life. He began to draw portraits. For a few dollars he promised, like a boardwalk artist today, a striking likeness while you wait. Soon he could charge more, and take more time. Swiftly he evolved a talent that, if he could hardly make it support himself and his family, saved him again and again from utter destitution. . . .

Under the pseudonym of "Mr. de T." there is limned in the following episode a character who was recognized instantly by Audubon's contemporaries as Professor Rafinesque, a genius of restless curiosity and a devouring appetite for scientific knowledge. Linguist, member of many learned societies, prolific writer, he was a man of the most fantastic self-conceit. And Audubon did not miss a detail of his visitor's eccentricities.

CONSTANTINE SAMUEL RAFINESQUE-SCHMALTZ, to give him his full title, was born in Constantinople, in 1783, of French-German parentage and was brought up in Genoa, where, as a child, he early mastered many languages and became fascinated with the flora and the fishes of the Riviera. In young manhood he lived in Sicily, where he had an exporting business in olive oil.

Fired with ambition to make a fortune and discover new species in the New World, Rafinesque came to America, but his ship was wrecked in Long Island Sound, and the cargo in which he had invested, was lost. . . . He sought access to the scientific group in Philadelphia, and was admitted to it, not without strong objection upon the part of some of the more conventional Philadelphians, but he failed repeatedly in seeking professorships and curatorships. Finally, however, a rich patron, then removing to Kentucky, took him along, to be employed as a full-time naturalist upon his benefactor's wilderness estates. But this man died soon after, and Rafinesque was once again disappointed.

Presently he found employment as a professor in the rising Transylvania University at Lexington: a shining light, for those times, of cultivation on the frontier. Here he did not escape the ridicule of the students and the faculty, but he was almost unconscious of them, in his rapture over the virgin territory in which he found himself—the Ohio with its beautiful shells, the rich forest flora, the hosts of birds, the Mammoth Cave, the Indian mounds. He published papers on everything and anything, amassed great quantities of specimens, and was sailing on in fine style, when he quarreled with President Holley, and quit the institution. It was just before this mishap that Rafinesque visited Audubon. . . .

[Of this visit, Audubon writes:]

"What an odd-looking fellow!" said I to myself, as, while walking by the river, I observed a man landing from a boat,

with what I thought a bundle of dried clover on his back. "How the boatmen stare at him! Sure he must be an original!" He ascended with a rapid step, and approaching me, asked if I could point out the house in which Mr. Audubon resided. "Why, I am the man," said I, "and will gladly lead you to my dwelling."

The traveler rubbed his hands together with delight, and drawing a letter from his pocket handed it to me without any remark. I broke the seal and read as follows: "My dear Audubon, I send you an odd fish, which you may prove to be underscribed, and hope you will do so in your next letter. Believe me, always your friend B." With the simplicity of a woodsman I asked the bearer where the odd fish was, when M. de T. (for, kind reader, the individual in my presence was none else than the renowned naturalist) smiled, rubbed his hands, and with the greatest good-humor said, "I am that odd fish I presume, Mr. Audubon." I felt confounded and blushed, but contrived to stammer an apology.

We soon reached the house, when I presented my learned guest to my family, and was ordering a servant to go to the boat for M. de T.'s luggage when he told me he had none but what he brought on his back. He then loosened the pack of weeds which had first drawn my attention. The ladies were a little surprised, but I checked their critical glances for the moment. The naturalist pulled off his shoes, and while engaged in drawing his stocking, not up, but down, in order to cover the holes about the heels, told us in the gayest mood imaginable that he had walked a great distance, and had only taken a passage on board the ark, to be put on this shore, and that he was sorry his apparel had suffered so much from his late journey. Clean clothes were offered, but he would not accept them, and it was with evident reluctance that he performed the lavations usual on such occasions before he sat down to dinner.

At table, however, his agreeable conversation made us all forget his singular appearance; and, indeed, it was only as we strolled together in the garden that his attire struck me as exceedingly remarkable. A long loose coat of yellow nankeen, much the worse for the many rubs it had got in its time, and stained all over with the juice of plants, hung loosely about him like a sac. A waistcoat of the same, with enormous pockets, and buttoned up to his chin, reached below over

a pair of tight pantaloons, the lower parts of which were buttoned down to the ankles. His beard was as long as I have known my own to be during some of my peregrinations, and his black hair hung loosely over his shoulders; his forehead was so broad and prominent that any tyro in phrenology would instantly have pronounced it the residence of a mind of strong powers. His words impressed an assurance of rigid truth, and as he directed the conversation to the study of the natural sciences, I listened to Mentor. He had come to visit me, he said, expressly for the purpose of seeing my drawings, having been told that my representations of birds were accompanied with those of shrubs and plants, and he was desirous of knowing whether I might chance to have in my collection any with which he was unacquainted. I observed some degree of impatience in his request to be allowed at once to see what I had. We returned to the house, when I opened my portfolios and laid them before him.

He chanced to turn over the drawing of a plant quite new to him. After inspecting it closely, he shook his head, and told me no such plant existed in nature; for, kind reader, M. de T., although a highly scientific man, was suspicious to a fault, and believed such plants only to exist as he had himself seen, or such as, having been discovered of old, had, according to Father Malebranche's expression, acquired a "venerable beard." I told my guest that the plant was common in the immediate neighborhood, and that I should show it him on the morrow. "And why tomorrow, Mr. Audubon? Let us go now." We did so, and on reaching the bank of the river, I pointed to the plant. M. de T., I thought, had gone mad. He plucked the plants one after another, danced, hugged me in his arms, and exultingly told me that he had got not merely a new species, but a new genus. When we returned home, the naturalist opened the bundle which he had brought on his back, and took out a journal rendered water-proof by means of a leather case, together with a small parcel of linen, examined the new plant, and wrote its description. The examination of my drawings then went on. You would be pleased, kind reader, to hear his criticisms, which were of the greatest advantage to me, for, being well acquainted with books as well as with nature, he was well fitted to give me advice.

It was summer, and the heat was so great that the windows were all open.

The light of the candles attracted many insects.

When it waxed late, I showed him to the apartment intended for him during his stay, and endeavored to render him comfortable, leaving him writing materials in abundance. I was indeed heartily glad to have a naturalist under my roof. We had all retired to rest. Every person I imagined was in deep slumber save myself, when of a sudden I heard a great uproar in the naturalist's room. I got up, reached the place in a few moments, and opened the door, when to my astonishment, I saw my guest running about the room naked, holding the handle of my favorite violin, the body of which he had battered to pieces against the walls in attempting to kill the bats which had entered by the open window, probably attracted by the insects flying around his candle. I stood amazed, but he continued jumping and running round and round, until he was fairly exhausted, when he begged me to procure one of the animals for him, as he felt convinced they belonged to "a new species." Although I was convinced of the contrary, I took up the bow of my demolished Cremona, and administering a smart tap to each of the bats as it came up, soon got specimens enough. The war ended, I again bade him goodnight, but could not help observing the state of the room. It was strewed with plants, which it would seem he had arranged into groups, but which were now scattered about in confusion. "Never mind, Mr. Audubon," quoth the eccentric naturalist. "Never mind, I'll soon arrange them again. I have the bats, and that's enough." . . .

M. DE T. remained with us for three weeks, and collected multitudes of plants, shells, bats, and fishes. . . .

We became perfectly reconciled to his oddities, and, finding him a most agreeable and intelligent companion, hoped that his sojourn might be of long duration. But, one evening when tea was prepared, and we expected him to join the family, he was nowhere to be found. His grasses and other valuables were all removed from his room. The night was spent in searching for him in the neighborhood. . . . Whether he had perished in a swamp, or had been devoured by a bear or a garfish, or had taken to his heels, were matters of conjecture; nor was it until some weeks after that a letter from him, thanking us for our attention, assured me of his safety.



Stand Thou Still

HUDDLESTON JONES, SENIOR, paced his office waiting for his son. A heap of documents on his desk clamored for attention, but he was in no mood for battling with the financial demands of an interfering government. On State Street, six stories down, the pillars flanking the portal of the building were plastered with name-plates, one of which bore the bald in-

scription: *Huddleston Jones, Incorporated.* To a passer-by, it might seem humbler and more tarnished than any of the others; but to those in the know, its magical luster cast a beam around the globe. Not since Cecil Rhodes welded the myriad tangled strands of Kimberley into a single cable dripping diamonds by the bucketful, had such a coördinating force as Huddleston Jones, Senior, arisen

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The story of an American pilot's great adventure in South America—by a distinguished American writing-man who was born in Brazil: the author of "Man Alone" and "The Stranger at the Feast."

By GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

to step in where men's best interests were at war.

On July 18, 1889, Rhodes passed to Barney Barnato a check for five million, three hundred and thirty-eight thousand, six hundred and fifty pounds—not dollars. It was the price of peace between the De Beers and Kimberley mines; and five million of it represented the cost of waiting ten years too long.

Huddleston Jones' entire success was built on the idea of not waiting too long. In Asia, the Urals, Africa, Peru, the Persian Gulf or on the Amazon, it was his business to be there first—occasionally in person, but more often represented by as ruffianly a group of proxies as any man ever gathered on a single pay-roll.

Like Rhodes, he was big, and a dynamo for converting intelligence into action;

but there the resemblance ceased. Not as peacemaker did Jones enter upon any scene, but with the impact of a hurricane. The steering of thousands of tons of hogs' bristles into one flood, with himself at the focal point, brought him half a million dollars net profit. When cheap copper reared its two heads on two continents and threatened to commit mutual *hara-kiri*, it was Jones who was all set to tell both sides where to get off and collect a million as his price to let everybody live.

The amalgamation of the Kowpac pearl-beds had netted him only a hundred thousand in cash, but had been a gem in its small way. Untold profits in belly-laughter had rolled in, simply because he had known when and where you could still go in for sheer piracy. As beach-combers his forces had drifted in; but they had risen as one man to capture five fleets and sail them away. Huddleston Jones had sold the boats back to their original owners—only, now the owners were known as Kowpac Pearl Fisheries, Limited, and glad of it. Two pretty games were still on the cards if only his own government would quit its wall-eyed meddling. One hung on the money value of the word *mahogany*; the other had to do with the diamond fields of Lençóes, rumored to be the toughest region on earth.

But all such amalgamations in the inaccessible regions of the earth meant nothing to him until possession was transferred into credit, and credit into cash. He had a motto: "*Men die; values never.*" On that foundation he had reared one flotation after another, and not a wildcat in the lot. The value had to be there, solid as the continent that happened to be its source. This process had become mere routine until a many-tentacled ogre rose overnight in his path, wearing on its brow like a blinding head-light the insignia *S.E.C.* Its very existence impugned his honor. He raged, he squirmed and he fought, wasting his strength. Under the incessant needling of authority, his single-track mind, habituated to the impetus of a roaring locomotive, had become a halting behemoth, bewildered, hamstrung and impotent. And now his son—

If there was one thing Jones, Senior, hated more than a Government agent, it was an airplane. He had never reasoned out his dislike, or he might have traced it back to the feel of a mule's straining withers between the knees, or the acrid

smell of sweating *machilla* bearers, memories imbedded in the fiber of his greatest triumphs. Love for the old way of doing a thing can eclipse love of the thing itself; but there was a source more subtle for his aversion. Since his son's sole interest was flying, flying had become the old man's major blind-spot. Thank heaven, there were still regions where no plane could land!

THE door opened, and Jones, Junior, entered. He was a replica of his father cast in smoother, more finely tempered metal. He had the same blue eyes, with the same trick of shading into purple under the spur of anger. But his hair was dark and clung close to his head, while his father's was grizzled and stood up like the crest of a cockatoo. The old man had married late a woman much younger than himself. He had never loved his son. He looked on him as an uninvited guest who had stolen love and life. He was a reminder of lost happiness, constantly blocking the door to oblivion. Within his face dwelt another face, wearing always a beseeching air....

"I'm here, sir," said Huddleston, Junior.

"High time," grunted his father, though it was barely ten o'clock. "Well, spill it. What's the idea—telephoning me you've broken off your engagement? Why?"

"As I told you over the phone, I can't tell you why," said Jones, Junior, quietly. "I wish I could, but I can't."

Then the old man cut loose. "Listen! I've handed you every chance a man ever gave a son—laid chances out in a row under your nose. You scraped through college at the tail end of the rag and tag. You never went out for a single sport—six feet of beef gone to waste, and nothing but bone at the top to make up for it. What did you get? A degree that smells to heaven of your crammer's midnight oil. And the nickname, *Eagle!* Eagle Jones! Hell! Have you never seen the laugh in that? The only living bonehead to have cracked up three planes—seventy-five thousand dollars gone to junk—without breaking his silly neck, and they call you *Eagle!*"

Jones, Junior, had seen his father in many a tantrum, but never anything approaching this bludgeoning rage. Perhaps some of the legends about the old man were true, particularly the one crediting him with having left a red mark on each of four continents. He controlled his own voice with difficulty.

"You're wrong on the figures, sir; only the plane I've got now cost twenty-five thousand." He studied his father curiously. "It sounds almost as if you wish I *had* broken my neck."

"Today I do!" shouted the old man. "Yesterday it was different. Yesterday you had one good mark to your credit: Yesterday you were engaged to a girl with looks, breeding, background and money—everything to make you into a man. But with the wedding less than a week off, you have the nerve to telephone me you've walked out on her! What for? I've asked you twice, as civilly as I knew how, but now I'm going to keep on yelling it until I get an answer. Why? What for?"

"There isn't any answer," said Huddleston, Junior; "but if you want an explanation, I've got one. When we like people, we build up pictures of them, pictures nobody else can see. A fellow thinks he's in love with a girl, and knocks somebody down for saying she toes in with her left foot. A year later, to his amazement, he realizes she does toe in, and always did. That's when he knows it's all over. Well, sir, Elaine started toeing in with her left foot yesterday afternoon, and that minute I knew I was through."

"Pictures!" scoffed Jones, Senior, all the angrier for being bewildered. "Left foot, right foot!" Then he found sure ground and continued with a rush: "Elaine doesn't toe in! She's as straight and trim as a yacht. Something happened. What was it?"

"I've told you," said his son patiently. "One minute I had a picture I'd been building for a whole year, and the next it was gone. What washed it out was a matter of no importance, according to Elaine, and perhaps she's right. But that doesn't save the picture. It's gone, and I'm on my way."

"You won't tell, eh? Well, I know who will! I'll call her up; I'll ask her."

"If you do, she'll probably tell you what I've been trying not to say," said Jones, Junior, the blue of his eyes deepening. "She'll tell you it was never any of your business, but now it's ten times none of your business."

Jones, Senior, touched a buzzer, gave instructions, and the two stood measuring each other until the call came through. Jones picked up the telephone, asked his question and got his answer. It was all over so quickly his son felt sorry for him.

"Did she tell you?" he asked.

"She said thank God she'd found out in time you're a small-town idiot; and whatever made her say it, I agree."

"That ought to satisfy us all," said Jones, Junior. "I'm lucky, and so are you. You don't even have the bother of shipping back the presents, so what are you kicking about?"

"You," said his father with peculiar resonance. "Where will I ship you?"

"Anywhere you like," said his son so promptly he must have prepared his answer. "I don't care whether it's hog-bristles in what's left of China, or gold in Cho-sen or copper on the Bahr el Jebel, or that mahogany mix-up out of Paitura."

His father gave a derisive snort.

"Paitura? That's a laugh! You'd go there, would you?"

"Yes—anywhere."

"Then step along to the cashier. Tell him to wangle an emergency passport for you in a hurry. Draw two thousand for expenses and go, damn it! Keep out of my sight until your ship sails. Go, and let's see how long you'll stick!"

"I don't like you," said his son with the air of one who has made an ultimate discovery. "Another picture has gone blooey; and I'm wondering whether toward the last, something didn't happen to Mother's build-up too."

His father raised his clenched hands. "Get out!" he whispered hoarsely. "Get out, before I hammer your face in!"

AN hour later, when Huddleston, Junior, was in his room, preparing to pack, the words still rang in his ears. Why had he dealt his father such a blow? As if seeking the answer, he looked through the window and down at an acacia just breaking into leaf. The tree was so tangled with memories of his dead mother that he could feel again the straining of her slender figure as she lifted him high into its crotch. He could hear her choking voice: "Oh, Huddie, be a kind man, big and kind, Huddie!" He could still see the glistening course of the tears tumbling down her cheeks, still remember the salty taste of them as she snatched him down and pressed his face to hers.

He turned away with a shake of his head, and started making a list of every article he could conceivably need. He laid the things out on his bed, then packed them in two capacious light-weight suitcases. Into each bag he squeezed a book inscribed "To Huddie from Mother." One was Bullfinch's

"Age of Fable," the other Macaulay's "Essays" and "Lays of Ancient Rome." That done, he called up a pilot chum on the roll of Panagra and talked to him for a full half-hour, pencil in hand. He sat staring at the galaxy of flaming names: Barranquilla, Cristobal, Buenaventura, Tumaco, Guayaquil, Talara, and at long last Paitura. In a semi-trance he went to the airport and stood around munching one sandwich after another while checking the servicing of his plane. The motor properly warmed and singing a sweet tune, he climbed into the cockpit.

"Luck, Eagle," shouted a grinning mechanic. "Happier landings!"

With that bit of historic sarcasm ringing in his ears, he gave her the gun and was off. . . . Twilight persisted around him long after the earth had darkened. It was almost nine when the gimcrack brilliance of Miami shattered the pale horizon-line. He landed, garaged his plane, secured a room, dined, then went to bed.

THE following day was devoted to getting his papers in order, but the next two days showed only such minor deviations from straight flight as the physical facilities imposed. He was on no sightseeing tour. This journey had a beginning and a definite end. It had started from musty offices in New York and was headed for still mustier surroundings amid the ruins of great cities that had rotted for centuries before New York was begun. It was far more than a stunt undertaken to turn the tables on his father; it was a division, such a sudden wall between present and past as no man could have built a generation ago.

Skirting the arid coast on the last lap of his journey, his vision seemed to borrow the fantastic clarity of the rarefied atmosphere around him. He could see his father distinctly enough to trace the purple filaments that webbed his nose. Then Elaine sprang to life before him; and to his amazement he could see himself, just as he had stood, just as she must have seen him during the ten minutes that had wiped out a year of thinking they knew each other. It was like watching two people on a stage, and listening to what they said:

The setting was Elaine's own little sitting-room and the word for that room, though she would have jeered at its resurrection, was *elegance*. Everything was exactly as it should be, including Elaine. What she wore, and the smooth set of her hair, merged into the backdrop. The

flaming pompons on her mules, the pearl-gray rug, the gloss of polished rawhide chair-seats and the burnt-umber of the hangings had the precision of a chord without resonance. Even her remembered voice seemed pitched to the same note, as if one blow on a tuning-fork had set the note for the whole of her, inside and out.

"Before you go, Eagle, there's one thing I believe I'm supposed to tell: You're the only man in the world—from now on."

There had been a moment of palpitating silence before he had understood. Even now, it didn't seem that the revelation itself had shocked him as much as the fact of her having delayed it so long. The one thing he couldn't remember, couldn't see himself do, was dropping his lighted cigarette. Slowly his mind had reassumed balance, and was weighing what she had said in even scales, urging him to be as fair to her as to himself, when her cry rang out:

"My rug! Oh, look what you've done! Look!"

It was the strident voice of anger more than of regret. He had placed his foot firmly on the burning cigarette, then drawn it away, exposing a charred pit in the soft pile of the pearl-gray rug. He had turned penitent eyes upon her, but the moment they beheld her face, penitence had yielded to astonishment. He had seen her angry before, and beautiful in her anger; but this fury over a bit of material damage transformed her into something positively ugly. He knew instantly he couldn't possibly build her up again into what she had once seemed.

"So it's the rug that matters," he had murmured, "only the rug!"

"Oh!" she gasped. "You!"

Then his own voice, unquestionably final: "I don't know you. Take your road, Elaine, and I'll take mine—a long road away from here."

Her words had followed him out like hurled pebbles. "Idiot! I loathe hypocrites. Never come back. *Never!*"

Already the whole business seemed small, and it was rapidly diminishing to a mere speck. But it had been big enough to split him and his father further apart than ever. Why hadn't he given the old man the raw fact? Because there are times when the truth isn't the truth. Elaine's past didn't figure in the new picture. Quite evidently he had never loved her; but that too didn't figure. All that mattered was his own astonishing awakening, a somersault of the



Illustrated by
Hamilton Greene

The waiter, startled out of
his habitual apathy, came
at a slipshod trot.

mind quite clear to himself, but that no words could have made plausible to his father.

He gave his shoulders a shake and threw back his head. Distance is a vague element, and never before had he grasped an inkling of its ultimate dimension. To the east rose the ghostly false horizon of the snow-capped spinal cord of a hemisphere. On his right, endlessly heaving, billowed the broad bosom of the green Pacific. Beneath, guiding him, a line of sand thin as a string gleamed intermittently between water and arid coast. Yet all this space was as nothing when he looked back at Elaine, his friends and her friends, all the places he had taken her—New York at two in the morning, or the beach at two in the afternoon, with the men pulling on their tops, and the girls scurrying to change from wet into fancy bathing-suits so they could make a pretense of lunching just as they were!

Farewell and good-by to all that.... It was far away, behind last Monday; and

this was Friday. Only eighty hours ago his father had ordered him out of his sight! Well? He smiled, then looked down, and was startled to see the long finger of the iron pier at Salaverry pointing out to sea. Studying the map, he found he had overshot his mark by a hundred miles. He banked, circled the scattered ruins of Grand Chimu, older than the Incas, older than history, headed north, and half an hour later landed at the makeshift airport outside Paitura in a burst of choking dust.

Chapter Two

HUDDLESTON JONES SENIOR, aside from his archaic blind spot, had a genius for picking the right tool for a given job. His men in the field, a sort of private Foreign Legion, ringed the globe. When his would-be rivals had to send out expensive experts from home, he had only to send a cable. Among his key men

there were those who knew languages, those whose specialty was human nature in the raw, those who could manhandle laws, and finally the brute division, ready to hammer its way through with fist, spambok or gun at command.

TOM DERWENT came as near as any man to combining these qualities; but despite his experience, he was stumped as to the why and wherefore of his presence in Paitura. His orders had been so succinct that no room was left for dodging. He was to open headquarters in Paitura and stay there. But from Paitura he was to secure certain documents emanating from Lima, and all of which would have to be signed, officially sealed and registered in Lima, four hundred miles away.

Of course the Old Man knew what he was about, but the procedure baffled Derwent.

Though he was only forty, his bristling short-cropped hair was already gray in patches. His skin, while healthy, had the mahogany look of long weathering in the tropics. His black eyes were as bright and hard as obsidian. He was not a large man, but his body had the compactness of a hammer-head. He had the courage of a terrier, and the killer persistence of a ferret. He could ask the same question of another man a dozen times in three languages without batting an eyelid; but to ask one of himself twice without getting the correct answer was infuriating.

Why not a jolly place like Trujillo or even Lima itself? Why Paitura? For in Paitura, desolate and forgotten, the droning somnolence of the main square gave to silence a monotonous and incessant voice—that silence became something he could hear. Against it a lonely street-cry became an echo, not an interruption; and that went for every other sound—the tolling of the cracked cathedral bells, the squeal of an oxcart or the hawking and spitting of the customers of the open café below Derwent's balcony. As he sat with his back to one of the high windows which gave upon it, before a table scarred with his heel-marks, a tall figure, hatless in a land where none but fools brave the sun, appeared before him.

“*Que quiere?*” he asked brusquely, then brought his feet down with a crash. “An American, eh? What d’you want?”

“I’m Eagle Jones,” said the stranger pleasantly; “otherwise Huddleston Jones, Junior. If you insist, I’d like a drink.”

Derwent leaned forward, his hands gripping the corners of the table tightly. “Say,” he drawled, dragging the words from deep down, “am I out of a job?”

“Just the opposite. You’re Tom Derwent, aren’t you? You’re taking on a new one—breaking me in.”

“The hell I will!” yelled Derwent, banging the table with a rocklike fist. Then his voice softened, and he continued in a purring whisper: “Have I been waiting for a chance like this! Me, loaded down with six months’ wages! Show me your papers, buddy boy, and I’ll take the first ship out—north, south or west. My job, you and your father can chase each other up and down a tree. It’s just like the old vulture to try to put over a fast one. Does he think I’ve cooked the books?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then why didn’t he tip me off you were coming?”

Jones hooked a bentwood chair with his foot, drew it toward him and sat down. He said: “Perhaps he did, and I beat the news to your door. He thinks I’m on some boat three days out of New York with three weeks more to go. He wouldn’t figure I’d be in a hurry to get here.”

“When did you leave?”

“Last Tuesday. I flew my own plane.”

Derwent stared stolidly, unwilling to betray surprise. “Your own plane, eh? Where did you leave it?”

“Out at Pan Pan with all my duffel locked in the baggage compartment. I thought I’d have a look around first.”

“Talk Spanish?”

“No.”

“Then how the devil does your dad figure I’m going to use you? Do you know what this job is? It’s gabbing at a loafing lawyer week after week, trying to prod him into prodding somebody else four hundred miles away in Lima to raise a pen and make his mark. Where do you come in on that?”

“I don’t know,” said Jones slowly: “but we’ll soon find out.” He glanced over the table, reached for a cable blank and wrote in block letters:

HUDDLEJONES, NEW YORK. UPON REPORTING FIND DERWENT UNINSTRUCTED AS TO MY ARRIVAL DUTIES POSITION AND PAY STOP HAVE BROUGHT PLANE AND COULD FERRY BETWEEN HERE AND LIMA SAVING TIME AND MONEY MERELY MY OWN SUGGESTION AWAIT ANSWER

JONES JUNIOR

He pushed the message across the table. "Any remarks?"

"I could cut it in half and say more," commented Derwent glumly, "but it's too hot to bother. Let's go file it and 'tend to that drink."

"Is there a hotel?"

— "There's a dump they call a hotel."

"Where do you live?"

"I'll show you," said Derwent.

He led the way into a vast rear room with high French windows. Across a corner hung a hammock inside an ingenious mosquito-net. Along one wall a row of pegs served as wardrobe. A washstand, a warped mirror, a couple of chairs and a small table only emphasized the cavernous emptiness of the dreary interior.

"Where's the bed?" asked Jones.

"No bed for mine," said Derwent; "I learned better up the Amazon years ago."

"You sleep in that hammock?"

"Sure. I lie slantwise, flat as a plank. Coolest bed on earth."

They went out to send the cable at deferred rates, since it would reach New York too late for office hours, anyway. Though he would not have admitted it in words even to himself, Derwent was impressed by anyone who could make a casual business of flying his own plane five thousand miles. He had often regretted the Old Man's aversion to flyers and flying. Had his son made a dent in it? If so, that was another kind of record, and anybody who could bend the old fossil was worth watching. His eyes flickered over Jones, Junior. The boy was handsome enough to start a Sunday riot, but didn't seem to know it. Hatless under the slanting rays of the setting sun, he sweated in his heavy suit without complaining, missed nothing as they walked along, but asked no questions.

YEET there was an eagerness about him that swept Derwent back out of a hard-boiled world. His own youth shimmered like a mirage before instead of far behind him. His nostrils dilated to a whiff of remembered freshness; and to his dismay, the ghosts of zest and hope rolled over in his blood, flapped their moth-eaten wings and made his eyelids sting. He steered Jones into a shop, bought a hat for him and clapped it on his head.

"Wear it," he ordered.

They had a drink. They took a jitney out to the flying-field, fetched Jones' baggage and went to the hotel. A square room served as its lobby, and an inner

door gave access to a long court with an open drain running down its center. The court was lined with rooms, each with a door but no window. Jones peered into one of the cubicles, and drew back from its dank odor.

"Is this the best hotel?" he asked.

"The only one," said Derwent.

"What about a boarding-house?"

"A boarding-house!" jeered Derwent. "I've been here four months without getting my nose inside a decent door."

Jones motioned to the barefoot porter to put his bags on the bed and started to open them. "See you later, Tom."

Derwent's leathery face turned red. "Aw, nuts," he said. "Come along to my room. I've got a twin hammock stowed away."

"Thanks," said Jones, so softly that the word became a sigh.

Derwent felt uneasy. Every Huddleston Jones field man wore an invisible badge—he had to be tough. Some of the vanguard knew each other through having to gang up on an occasional project, but no two of them were friends. Hardness was an essential. It determined their value to the firm and made life bearable by walling out all yesterdays and every form of sentimental rot. That this likable youngster happened to be the Old Man's son didn't change the picture in the slightest as far as he himself was concerned. No soft man could be of any use to Huddleston Jones, Incorporated—to turn soft was a sure pass into the army of the unemployed!

In silence Derwent rigged the extra hammock with its mosquito-net, funneled at each end; but there his cooperation ceased. Jones, Junior, had to clear half the pegs on the wall for himself and hang up the few clothes he needed. They went down to the café below together and sat at the table which habit had established as Derwent's own. The silence didn't seem to bother Jones, as if he realized that only strangers or friends can keep their mouths shut without giving offence. His eyes took in the tiled floor, the sleazy cloth, the arches of the arcade and the cobbled square beyond. The incessant buzzing of flies mingled with the odor of raw rum.

The scraping of a chair, or a man spitting, were sounds near enough to recognize, but every other form of commotion blurred in his ears as if blanketed by the falling night. He had always thought of monotony as handcuffed to time; but now he discovered it could be as sudden

as cracking your shins on a bench scarred with the initials of generations of idlers. So this was the cake his father had known he'd have to eat! Already the feel of grit was between his teeth. He remembered that Derwent had been marooned here for months. No wonder he wouldn't or couldn't talk. . . .

The night passed; the morning passed; and by noon they were back at the same table. A barefoot messenger loafed into the place and handed Derwent a cable. He slit the envelope, read the message and crumpled the flimsy into a tight little ball. This was what he had been waiting for—what the marrow in his bones had known was on the way. He forgot the man in front of him. He forgot Paitura. The whole sub-continent became a funnel for the roar of the Old Man's voice: *"A punk is the answer to that fool cable. Give him the works. Break him, or I'll break you."*

Derwent went outside to wipe the sweat that had started streaming down his neck. He reviewed what had happened, trying to mark the spot where he had gone wrong. Was it his fault Eagle Jones had flown down instead of taking a steamer and had even beaten the air mail? But he knew that didn't let him out. He had started making a fool of himself the minute he had cared a hoot where anybody slept. By wrapping welcoming arms around a stranger, he had saddled himself with a punk for a roommate and made the job ahead twice as hard—night and day. He had gone soft, but he didn't have to stay soft. He went back to the table and sat down.

"Bad news from home?" asked Jones.

DERWENT began the cure right there. He stared at Jones without answering. Not a muscle in his face moved, not even an eyelid. He didn't look into Jones' eyes but through them, as if they weren't there. Jones had the sensation of becoming a vacuum, eliminated from thought, sight and memory. It was as though he had never arrived. He turned red, but after a moment a half-smile lifted one corner of his mouth. He hadn't read the message, but he didn't need to. His father's uplifted fist had come down hard. Measuring Derwent, he realized this was the way he was going to look and act for days, perhaps for months. Though no student, Jones was far from stupid. Witness the matter of the cash advance: Because he had read somewhere of a man starving to death in a

South American city with a thousand-dollar bill crumpled in one fist, he had forced the cashier to get him most of the two thousand in small notes.

The average individual would have fought Derwent's silence with silence and made it a humdrum tug-o'-war. Jones was clever enough to do just the opposite. Beginning with that first noontime meal, he started chatting as affably as if to a kindly and interested friend. So casually did he embark on his patter that Derwent was fooled—Jones' chatter, far from hurting, might even further his own plan. Let the lad talk. Sooner or later he would be convinced he wasn't being heard, and his tongue would dry up in his mouth. Silence always wins out. In the end the boy was bound to break and run.

Only gradually did Derwent perceive he was being attacked, and at first the discovery amused him. But a day came when he felt a stab of premonition. If he had a system, so had Jones. His own was passive; Jones' was active and as sinister as the constant dripping of water that can hollow a stone. His own system put a strain on every nerve in his body, while Jones' was a sort of game.

For instance: "You're right, Tom. That was a bit of luck, running into Arnaldo. He's nuts on archeology. I can't understand much of what he says yet, but he's teaching me Spanish a lot faster than I'm feeding him English. Funny little chap! You'd have laughed to hear him size you up. Oh, no—nothing as bad as that. . . . Sure. Until I came along, he thought you were some sort of crook doing a hide-out. Now your stock has gone up. On account of me, on account of the plane. . . . No, guess again. That's it. Everybody thinks your folks drip money and that I'm your male nurse. Get it?"

They happened to be at dinner; and before Derwent could stop himself he slammed down his beer-mug so violently it cracked and the stout flowed out. His heart missed a beat as though staggered by a blow. What was this? Was he going to take a licking from a whipper-snapper whose neck he could wring with one hand? To save himself from speech, he stared glassily at the dark stain spreading rapidly through the sleazy table-cloth. A few of the customers glanced at him curiously; and the waiter, startled out of his habitual apathy, came at a slipshod trot. It was Jones who, in his gentlest voice, ordered another bottle of stout; he had learned that much Spanish weeks ago.

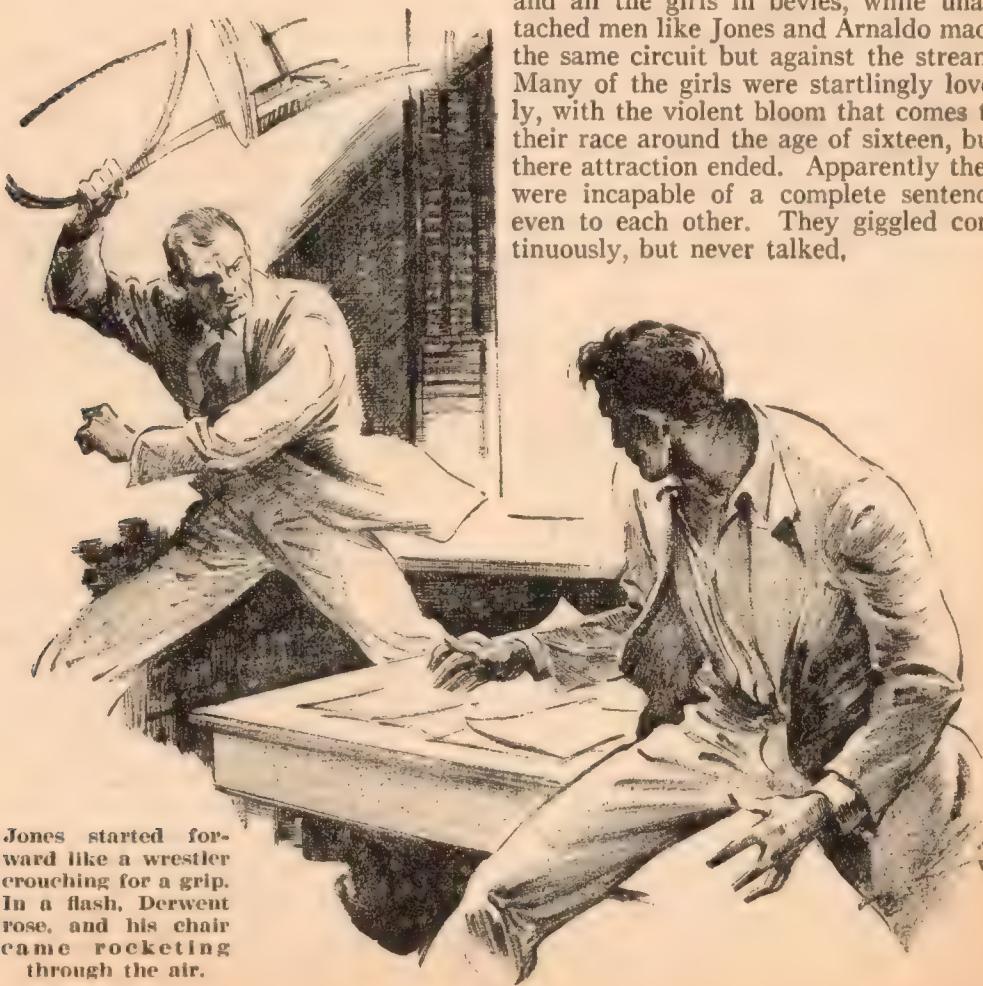
STAND THOU STILL

In the privacy of his own mind, Derwent started making excuses for himself. With his nerves worn to a frazzle before Jones turned up, fresh as a meadow buttercup, he hadn't had a fair chance. If there had been work to do, lots of it, it wouldn't have been so bad. If he could have set Jones to copying a meaningless ledger or done it himself—but there was no ledger. No letters—nothing. Just sitting around the office, waiting for the local lawyer to come in with his bland excuses as to why this hadn't been done, consequently it was no use starting that and that and that. The sight of Jones sitting there too, reading Bullfinch for a stretch, then switching over to Macaulay, only made things worse.

Every few days, not half often enough, Jones would walk out without a by-your-leave. Half an hour later would come the droning of a motor high overhead, and Derwent would realize Eagle Jones was calmly enjoying a breather half a mile above the dust and sweat and reek. Der-

went knew he ought to have grounded the plane the day the Old Man cabled, but now he thanked his stars he hadn't. His relief while the droning lasted was fantastic. Not only his mind would relax, but every nerve and tendon in his body. These rest-periods were his salvation, and after each of them he would snap into form again. Wait—just sit back and wait. The same dry rot that had got him would yet get Jones, and it would eat into his soft meat twice as fast!

BESIDES the plane, Jones had another out. Spanish is the easiest and most liquid of languages; and through frequent excursions with Arnaldo, it had been seeping into the Eagle's fallow mind. Already he could take pleasure in talking, but there were other barriers that would not yield so readily. No home save the humblest was open to him, not even Arnaldo's. Also an immemorial law ordained that during the Sunday parade around the main square, every wife should walk on the arm of her husband, and all the girls in bevies, while unattached men like Jones and Arnaldo made the same circuit but against the stream. Many of the girls were startlingly lovely, with the violent bloom that comes to their race around the age of sixteen, but there attraction ended. Apparently they were incapable of a complete sentence even to each other. They giggled continuously, but never talked.



Jones started forward like a wrestler crouching for a grip. In a flash, Derwent rose, and his chair came rocketing through the air.

Jones was amused in a detached sort of way. The collapse of his private romance was so recent he was still immunized, but that didn't prevent his keeping his eyes and ears open. He gathered that while Trujillo was as modern as its new airport, and Lima a hotbed of sophistication, Paitura had somehow been left far behind, barely a jump ahead of the Inquisition. Nobody entertained. Church and the Sunday promenade were the nearest approach to sociability. Then how did people arrive at marriage? He asked Arnaldo.

"It's very simple," said Arnaldo. "You decide on a girl. A mutual friend of both families presents you, and you become engaged." He cast a curious glance at Jones' face. "Why? Are you thinking of marrying?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Jones fervently. "But how do you pick the girl? Don't you ever date her—take her out? Aren't there any dances?"

Arnaldo sighed. "Those things are done elsewhere, but not here. Paitura is not yet emancipated. You think the girls don't look at you, but they do—all of them. If you don't believe me, try looking at one of them more than another. Do it three times running. Soon you'll find out whether she's seen you or not."

"How?" asked Jones.

"By her father asking me to ask Señor Tomas to ask you whether you would like to be presented."

"Then I'd be engaged, eh?"

"Yes," said Arnaldo. "From the moment of presentation, you would be engaged."

"I'll say it's simple!" murmured Jones. "Let's quit the parade and have a drink."

When there was ice, he stuck to whisky and soda, but frequently the local plant would break down, and on those days he drank stout. Arnaldo never varied his *refresco*, water flavored and colored with grenadine. He was a mild youth, not very tall, with sallow cheeks and an angular face enlivened by two black-brown eyes. His eyes were an index to everything that went on inside him. When he was sad, they wept without tears. When he dreamed, they took on distance, but an inverted distance—it was the person looking into them who saw far away. When he was excited or angry, their depth vanished and light seemed to bounce off them as if from a reflector. He had accosted Jones originally because he wanted to practice his schoolbook English, but

now he took pride in being Señor Honéz' lone native associate. When he thought that some day Señor Honéz might consent to take him up for his first flight, the palms of his hands would get quite wet.

Chapter Three

THOUGH Arnaldo had never asked out and out for a ride, Jones guessed what was in his mind, and played a sort of game, balancing one wish against another. He had glanced into various miserable huts, swarming with grimy children, chickens and a pig. He had looked into a dozen combination shops and houses whose proprietors worked or bartered in the front and lived in the rear. But there were other streets in Paitura where every dwelling had barred windows and a pretentious *zaguan*, a portal big enough to admit a horse and carriage. In one leaf of the great door there would be a wicket for daily use, and in the other a tiny judas through which anybody who sought admittance could be inspected.

Occasionally he had seen a wicket open while somebody slipped out, but only once had he managed to look through the cobbled entrance and catch a glimpse of lush green within. The secrecy of these houses stirred him in a peculiar way. He was far more curious as to the houses themselves than as to the people who lived in them. He gave Arnaldo to understand the price of a flight was a stroll through one of the hidden patios. Arnaldo said if the flight should end around two, he thought the matter might be arranged. It was easy to guess why he picked that hour—all of Paitura, servants and masters, slept from one to three.

Two days later Jones and Arnaldo rode to the airport and dismissed the jitney.

To give Arnaldo a bigger thrill, Jones got out an old helmet he had worn on his first solo flight and which he always carried with him for luck. Then he found a pair of goggles—expensive made-to-order ones, they were. He put these and the helmet on Arnaldo—who swelled visibly with pride—and strapped him into the seat. . . . At five thousand feet he did a little stunting to make sure his passenger got his money's worth, then leveled out and cut the motor. He turned and saw Arnaldo with eyes tight shut, his hands tensely gripped.

"Hi!" he called. "Wake up! What do you want to see? The ruins of Chimu? The cordillera?"

Arnaldo opened his eyes and looked down, but remained speechless. Paitura was so flattened it looked like a patch on a workman's pants. The city lay at the stem of a vast basin shaped like a shell, with its fluted edge rising into the mountain range. Once the region had been fertile and famous for its tobacco and cane; but erosion, flood and generations of wasteful tilling had carried the soil over the cliff and into the sea. Now there remained only an arid expanse centered upon the patch of red-brown roofs that marked the city. Jones volplaned down until he could distinguish the startling green of more than one patio. The sight of them, like embedded emeralds, sharpened his desire to visit one. He started the motor, zoomed to the crest of the cordillera, then banked and landed.

Arnaldo pulled off helmet and goggles and stared at them unbelievingly. They were the emblem of his initiation into adventure, the witness to his prowess. He caressed them; and tucking them under his arm, he started toward the city almost at a trot. For once Jones had to lengthen his stride to keep up. Neither spoke, but as they approached the town, Arnaldo glanced anxiously upward at the sun as if to make sure it registered the apex of the siesta hour, when all self-respecting adults would be plunged in slumber. They reached the juncture of the main avenue with a lesser street.

"This way," murmured Arnaldo as he turned the corner. Presently he paused at a *zaguan*, produced a key, unlocked the wicket and motioned for Jones to pass. "Quietly, please."

Jones stepped into the cobbled entrance. It was like an arched tunnel. On his right was a blank wall; on the left shallow steps led up to the door which gave access to the formal rooms of the house. It was closed; but straight ahead, inviting him, lay the patio. He entered it, and its sudden luxuriance enveloped his senses like a cloud. Waxen leaves, fragrant blooms and an odor of moist loam formed such a contrast with the grime of all the days he had spent in Paitura that he felt as if he had been transported into another clime.

"I couldn't have believed it," he murmured. "It's cool in here—and quiet!"

The stillness was broken by a gasp. He turned toward the sound, and stared with caught breath at a girl in the act of rising out of a hammock-chair in the shadows on his right. She was dressed only in a silk wrap-around and native

leather sandals, but instantly he got a sensation of watching a conflagration rather than of looking at clothes or the lack of them. Anger made her beauty so vivid that it shocked him. Its violence confused the eye with a complex of unpaintable tones. The white of her skin hovered between pallor and marble. Against it her unrouged lips showed red, yet they weren't red but pink. Her skin lent the same sort of illusion to her mop of hair. Seen in the mass it seemed black; then its disorder assumed shades that suggested movement rather than color.

His instinct was to back away as he would from a fire; but before he could move, Arnaldo stumbled forward to babble an introduction.

"*Es Señor Honez*," he explained desperately, "*el Americano*." He tugged at Jones' arm and stammered in a horrified tone: "My sister."

No woman cares to be waked out of sound sleep to face anybody, let alone a stranger. The girl's fury descended on her brother in such swift Spanish that Jones could distinguish no single word; yet the sum of what she said was as unmistakable as a flow of lava. Without pausing to mutter an apology, and forgetting to recover his helmet and goggles, he turned and fled. He ducked through the wicket, and upon reaching the street found he was more angry than bewildered by what had happened. The patio had transported him into another world, but his collision with the girl had swept him back to his last moments with Elaine.

WOMEN were the same everywhere, he raged, as he strode along; only the rules were different. Here, if you looked at one twice, you were hooked for life. Soon he'd have to learn some new way to breathe! A feeling of nausea seized him, so sudden he thought he must be ill. He blamed the girl, never dreaming she was merely the last straw, and that he had been on the point of cracking, anyway. Weeks of silence. No letter from home, no message, no sign that anybody remembered or cared. The mask of Derwent's face seemed to dance before him, and his fingers itched to tear it to shreds. He walked faster and faster, and took the stairs to the office two steps at a time. What world was he in? Who knew the rules? To hell with this blind-fold game! He burst into the front room and stood glaring at Derwent's bullet head framed between the soles of his feet.



"Talk to me, damn it," said Jones hoarsely. "Talk to me, or take what's coming. If you don't loosen your jaw, I'll do it for you. I'll loosen it so it'll take two doctors, two weeks and a nurse to put it back. Talk, damn it!"

Derwent's expression didn't change, yet he began to laugh. Laughter shook his torso, and his legs and set his toes to jiggling. So it had come at last—the boy had cracked! Jones went white and started forward like a wrestler crouching for a grip. In a flash Derwent's feet disappeared. He rose, and the chair in which he had been sitting came rocketing through the air. Jones had to drop on his knees to dodge it; and before he could rise, Derwent had cleared the table and landed on him.

They fought the way lumberjacks used to fight—no holds barred. Rolling across the bare floor, they tore at whatever they could reach. The white cotton of their jackets, wet with sweat, ripped easily and soon hung in tatters, pink with blood. Locked in a column, they struggled to their feet, stamped on each other's toes and raked each other's shins with their heels. But even at the height of the fight, Jones woke to the fact he was happy. What infuriated him was the conviction that Derwent was happy too. The explanation was simple, but neither of them had time to think it out. For weeks poison had been banking up in their veins, and this was the joy of its release.

DERWENT ducked his head for a butt below the belt; at that instant Jones happened to bring up a knee. By sheer chance it caught Derwent full on the chin. His legs sagged as though they had turned to water, and he slipped to the floor. Jones, astonished, stared down at his motionless body. He rolled it over

and lifted the eyelids, the way he had seen trainers do in the ring. One look at Derwent's eyeballs frightened him. He fetched the ewer from the bedroom and dashed the water over Derwent's head. That brought him to. He groaned, braced his hands and raised himself to a sitting position.

"What happened?" he asked dazedly. "We were fighting, and then something happened."

Before Jones could answer, a ludicrous interruption occurred. The local lawyer entered, flapping his arms. With one hand he waved his bowler hat, with the other a sheaf of documents. "*Hé aquí!*" he shouted. "We have won! Our labor is finished. Señor Tómas, we have triumphed!" Only then did he take in the bloody condition of the two occupants of the room. "*Señores!*" he gasped. "*Señores! Que pasa?*"

"Nothing," said Derwent, struggling to his feet. He held out his hand for the documents and went through them one by one, scarcely daring to believe his eyes. Presently he passed them to Jones, Junior. "Here you are, Eagle. Read them. Take your time. I guess I'm due for a holiday. And as for you—you can toddle home with your flag still flying."

The lawyer stood by with jaw fallen. Chancing to look at him, Derwent laughed. He made out a check for his final fee, and after much handshaking succeeded in dismissing him. Then he went to work on a cable in code to the home office. Meantime, Huddleston, Junior, was absorbing the following facts: The papers referred to a property on the Amazonian border of Peru. They testified to the foreclosure in faraway Lima of a mortgage on the said property in the name of an insignificant resident of Paitura. This resident had then signed over



all the rights acquired to Huddleston Jones, Incorporated, and delivered every pertinent document, including an order for eviction fully instrumented by the courts. It was a neat, complete job.

Derwent put on a fresh jacket and stepped out to file his message. When he returned, his step was as light as his tongue was loose.

"**B**OY," he exclaimed, "we can sure talk now!"

"Why?" asked Jones. "What's different?"

Derwent stared at him. "The job's cleaned up, aint it? I declare this office closed; and on my own time I've got a right to be myself." He looked Jones over with a kindly eye. He liked him. The boy had everything—looks, manner and fists. A puzzled frown rutted Derwent's brow. "Every man carries around a blind eye," he declared.

"What made you think of that one?" asked Jones.

"Your old man. Every man has something he can't see until it hits him on the nose. I'm glad you're going to land a Mary Ann on his beezer. You stuck it out to the deadline, and I'll tell him so."

"You make me laugh," said Jones.

"With tears in your eyes!" grunted Derwent.

"From looking at *your* blind eye, Tom," said Jones; "and it's as big as a house. You won't tell the old boy anything for a long time, because this job isn't ended; it's just begun. Have you forgotten my father cut his milk-teeth on a keg of nails?" He tossed the sheaf of papers on the desk. "There's his nugget of virgin gold. Why did you have to dig for it in Paitura?"

"Answer that one yourself, and I'll kiss your knee," said Derwent sullenly.

"Because in Paitura you got it for next to nothing, and no questions asked. Because in Lima you'd have rammed your fool head into a nest of hornets and paid a million. Where's your brain? What do you suppose the old boy is after? Haven't you heard there's a mahogany war on at home?"

"No," said Derwent, sitting down heavily. "Keep right on teaching."

"Since my dad's in it," said Jones, "you ought to have smelled right off the bat that somewhere two dogs are fighting for a bone. The name of the bone is the word *mahogany*. Perhaps you've heard of Philippine and African mahogany. Trade terms, Tom—nothing but! There isn't any genuine mahogany in Africa or the Philippines, and there never was."

"So what?" asked Derwent dully.

Jones leaned over to tap the papers. "There's real mahogany on this property, and since the word *mahogany* means such a lot to two sides of a fight, the minute my father gets your cable, somebody is either going to get clubbed to death or pay through nose and ears."

"How the hell was I to know that?" Derwent muttered. "But you're right, Eagle. I ought to have guessed it, and the Huddleston Jones scout who can't guess is out. I owe you a string of drinks. Come and get 'em."

No later than the next morning Jones, Senior's, answer exploded before his eyes:

YOUR JOB JUST STARTED CLOSE OFFICE
PERMANENTLY DRAW PLENTY CASH SECURE
EVERY AVAILABLE MULE AT RAILHEAD AND
GET TO THE PROPERTY MOVE FAST AND UP-
ON COMPLETION OF EVICTION CABLE POS-
SESSION THROUGH MESSENGER TO IQUITOS
THEN START FELLING MAHOGANY HURRY
SLAM THIS THING THROUGH SINCE EVERY
MINUTE COUNTS.

Derwent passed the message across the table. "There you are, Eagle. He was in too much of a sweat to code it—or perhaps now he doesn't give a damn who knows what."

They sat in silence, Derwent worried and Jones watching him curiously. Derwent knew what he was up against. Huddleston Jones, Senior, didn't know and he wouldn't have cared if he had. Jones, Senior, never asked, wanted or read an explanation—only results interested him. Derwent's eyes took on a range of five hundred miles. At this season of the year, once the mules had slid down the eastern slope of the cordillera, they would sink to their bellies in ooze, and flounder at the rate of a hundred yards to the hour. Mosquitoes—gnats—reptiles—and never a glimpse of the sky. A steady drip from the high roof of the trees. Soaked clothes, soaked food, soaked hammocks and soaked ground. He began to curse softly a steady rumble of unprintable words.

JONES, JUNIOR, found them a gratifying accompaniment to his own thoughts. He felt bitter, for the iron of omission had stabbed him where it hurt. Up to this moment he had managed to preserve a blurred figure of his father as watching him from afar, thinking of him, perhaps even beginning to admire him against his will. Now he awoke to the truth with such a jolt it gave him a sickish feeling. His father had blotted him out as if he had never been—had forgotten him and his plane. Only hate for both of them could have blinded him to what that combination meant today.

The young man's fists doubled, and he interrupted Derwent's fervent monologue.

"Shut up!"

"Why?" asked Derwent.

"Think before you talk," said Jones. "How long would it take to get certified copies of these papers? Not all of them—just the ones you'd need on the spot to take possession?"

"By shoving grease into the right palms," said Derwent slowly, trying to think of six things at once, "I could do it in a couple of hours."

"In two hours," said Jones, Junior, speaking each word distinctly, "I could service my bus for a thousand-mile hop."

Derwent gave an inarticulate gasp that presently evolved into speech. "You're crazy! The roof of that forest is two hundred feet high, and so solid if you dropped a pail of pins, not one would reach the ground."

"The Old Man never does things by halves," said Jones bitterly. "Until this last cable, I didn't believe he could kick me completely out. Now I want to hit him with all I've got—hit him harder than he ever hit me. Listen! Fix me up with a clearance and the certified copies, split the cash two ways, and I'll be in Iquitos before dark tonight."

Derwent gave a quick shake of his head. "I—I wouldn't dare. If you didn't get through, I wouldn't know it for—"

"Hell," interrupted Jones, "I'm not stopping you from starting, am I? If I flop, it's lights out; but I won't flop. The minute I make Iquitos, I'll grab a lawyer, charter the fastest boat to be had—and what happens? Weeks before your mules are belly-high in mud, the Old Man will get the word he's waiting for. And will he rave!"

Derwent's eyes moistened for the first time in years. "By God, we'll do it! I'm yours from now on, Eagle. Let the old buzzard eat dirt for once instead of meat. Stick it to him. If he doesn't like it, you and I will start a racket of our own. We'll take one of his own jobs and slap it back in his face."

"Don't rave," said Jones. "Let's get going."

It was barely ten o'clock and the sheer joy of action turned them into optimists. They worked and they sweated. Jones bought all the high-test gas there was, plenty and to spare for the five-hundred-mile flight. He packed everything he owned into the two suitcases. On his first trip to the landing-field he hurled them into the ample baggage compartment; and in his haste to give the motor a preliminary warm-up, forgot to lock it.

Where the heck was his helmet—his lucky helmet? Then he remembered. . . . Upon returning to town, he stopped at Arnaldo's home, let fall the heavy knocker, then hammered with his fists on the door. The tiny slide of the judas opened, and a frightened servant peered out. Jones explained volubly; the maid disappeared, and presently he was looking into the unforgettable eyes of Arnaldo's sister. She didn't open the wicket. Through the judas she told him Arnaldo was off for a day of archeological snooping; that she would do her best to find the helmet, but it would take time. Where would he wish it sent? He told her his plane at the airport, and hurried away. For an hour he sat in the office, waiting. When Derwent arrived with the papers and cash, it was already three o'clock.

"Better wait until morning, Eagle."

"The hell I'll wait! I said I'd be in Iquitos by dark, and I will."

"All right," said Derwent. "But hold on a minute." Out of a drawer he dragged a Luger in an armpit holster, and a belt stuffed with ammunition. "Take these."

"What for?"

"I thought so!" snarled a transformed Derwent. "You pinfeathered pipsqueak, don't you know what you've offered to bite off in my place? The first guy on this new property that says no to you, you're supposed to put a bullet through his belly and leave the rest to your dad's slimy lawyers. Grow up—take the gun!"

To stop the argument, Jones slipped off his jacket, adjusted the holster and put on the belt. Resuming his coat, he stowed the papers inside it and stuffed the banknotes into his breeches' pockets.

When he arrived once more at the landing-field, there was no sign of his helmet. To the devil with it! He slipped into the harness of his 'chute, climbed aboard, pressed the starter and warmed the motor until it hit its steadiest note. He pointed the plane into the wind, fed her the gun, first slowly and then wide open.

Just as the plane started to lift, a chance gust from the west whipped the left wing up, and the right wing brushed the dust. Only his speed and a quick turn saved him, but he was puzzled. Had he been wrong about the wind? He stole a quick glance at the wind sock. No, he hadn't been wrong; the wind was from the east all right; but far out to sea, he caught a glimpse of a strange ridge of yellow haze. Ignoring it, he headed due east and up, gained altitude and climbed higher and higher. Presently he sensed a quick lift of the tail. He looked back and saw that the bank of yellowish haze had become solidified into a rising black rampart of cloud.

For an instant he hesitated—the wise thing would be to turn back. But why cheat himself out of a following wind? The storm was a blessing. It was a cinch he would beat it to the watershed. . . .

One thing, however, he knew nothing about and couldn't calculate—the gigantic unseen squeeze between the oncoming compression and the towering barrier of the Andes. He thought he was riding high and handsome, and even a flash from behind followed by the crash of thunder only made him laugh. But the next moment the electric cataclysm dived under him, struck the rocky range and was curling back in a wave miles high. Light-

ning and thunder from the mountains roared defiance at lightning and thunder from the sea.

His ship tossed, dipped and pitched like a leaf in a gale. In desperation he headed south through the mighty trough dividing the contending storms. There came an infinitesimal pause between two crashes; and during that instant of silence he heard a human cry—an unbelievable sound. He thought he must have dreamed it; but he cast a glance over his shoulder. Dumfounded, he caught a glimpse of Arnaldo, in the missing helmet and goggles, crawling from the baggage compartment and clawing his way forward.

Jones let the ship ride and tumble. Growling curses, he reached backward, dragged the limp figure into the spare seat and managed to snap the safety-belt. Then he seized the controls again; the plane was being hurled upward like a spark in a flue. The higher it went, the lighter grew his heart. Here was hope. East, drive her east, and if he could jump the endless wall of the cordillera, he would have plenty of time to think.

He made it, but no longer was there any question of flying north, south or west. A sudden rushing stillness was all about him, and it was rushing due east. A hundred-mile gale was riding his tail, and he was riding the gale. He settled back with a whistling sigh. Keep her nose up and let her drift—that's all there was to it now. . . .

He had been flying for almost an hour when he realized a half-formed thought had been tapping at his brain ever since he had reached back to strap in Arnaldo. Hands—something to do with hands! Then the thought crashed through, and the blood in his veins turned icy. The hands he had seen clamped in terror to the sides of the seat were not Arnaldo's. Those fingers—long, white and slender—were not Arnaldo's fingers.

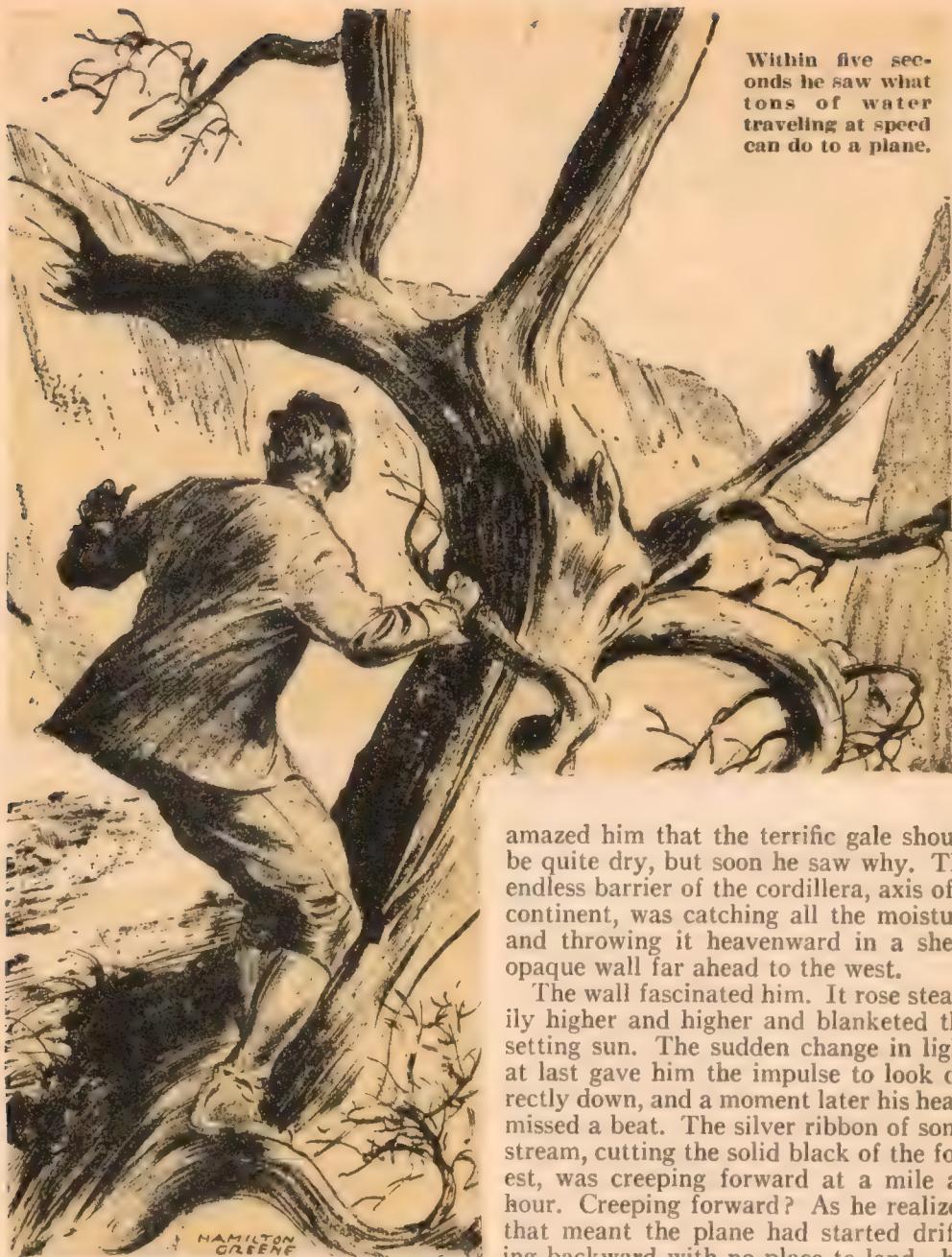
Chapter Four

H UDDLESTON JONES, JUNIOR. . . . Eagle Jones! It was an inner voice warning him to keep his head and ride high. The plane, hurtling through space in a straight line, no longer tossed. Except for the roar of the motor, there was stillness, a stillness as ominous as the dead center between the two impacts of a hurricane. Even so, it gave him a chance to marshal his scattered thoughts.



Who was Arnaldo? A companionable youngster who had followed him around like a friendly dog, whose double-barreled surname he had heard a dozen times but could never remember, and who had introduced his sister simply as his sister. That left her completely nameless; and suddenly the memory of her flaming anger broke in on his calm with a crash. It was she who was with him now! Disguised in the "lucky" helmet and goggles, and togged out in her brother's suit, she was heading away from home at more than two hundred miles an hour.

He tightened his jaws in helpless fury. Iquitos—he had bragged he would be in Iquitos by dark! Iquitos was north of Paitura, and he was still flying east. Just when had he started? Three? Half-past? He glanced at the clock. It was a safe bet they had already done two hundred miles. His eyes took on a fixed stare. Why bother about Iquitos now? Only one thing mattered: Get back, get rid of the girl even if he had to drop her over the airport in his chute. Without her he had a chance; but with her, he would be lost wherever he landed. The wind became an



Within five seconds he saw what tons of water traveling at speed can do to a plane.

enemy, something he must take by the throat and throttle at whatever cost. With a straining lurch, he banked and headed into the gale.

Beneath him already was spread the mightiest forest on earth, a forest so vast and a river system so fantastic that ocean liners could steam for a thousand miles at a stretch between walls of trees. In spite of the steady roar of its motor, the plane was hanging as still as a star; but he didn't know it—not yet. Too many other things, engaging his attention, kept him from looking straight down. It

amazed him that the terrific gale should be quite dry, but soon he saw why. The endless barrier of the cordillera, axis of a continent, was catching all the moisture and throwing it heavenward in a sheer opaque wall far ahead to the west.

The wall fascinated him. It rose steadily higher and higher and blanketed the setting sun. The sudden change in light at last gave him the impulse to look directly down, and a moment later his heart missed a beat. The silver ribbon of some stream, cutting the solid black of the forest, was creeping forward at a mile an hour. Creeping forward? As he realized that meant the plane had started drifting backward with no place to land—his brain offered a subtle suggestion:

"You're finished. You've fallen down on the job for the last time. You're headed for Paitura, but you'll never get there—never get anywhere. Don't try!"

It was the voice of the tempter, urging him to take the easiest way. All he needed to do would be to hover until his gas gave out, then flutter down to his fourth and last crash. That would settle everything—blot out his father's final jeer and dispose of the girl. The thought of her brought him up short. Was he crazy? Did what any town might say or think weigh more than a life? His brain quit

its teasing and began to function as steadily as a gyroscope. Paitura lost all importance: his business was to save the girl and himself. But how? Since there was small hope of finding a spot before dark where he could land, he must nurse his gas by riding the wind due east. There was no other chance.

He made the turn, and steadying the ship, glanced over his shoulder. The girl was doubled over, hanging jackknifed on the belt. He reached back to release it, and she slipped to the floor. Half dead with fright, she lay as inert as a wet sack; he did not try to rouse her. . . . Night fell; and to add to his distress, the gale—now that he needed it most—began to lessen. As hours passed, the fuel gauge became an hourglass that no power could reverse. As it sank lower and lower, he began to pray for the dawn.

When dawn broke at last, it was the strangest that he had ever seen. He had been prepared to guard his eyes from the blazing sun; but there was no blaze, no sun. In its place a green and jaundiced light spread its maismic veil over the face of a sickly earth. No longer was there wind. As he flew low, searching feverishly then desperately for a chance to land, he had a sensation of having passed into a strange and unfriendly world. Weird shapes emerged in relentless profusion. Reaching fingers of organ cacti, spiny euphorbias, spread-eagled, prickly pears, starving cattle and leafless thorn trees, all thickly interspersed with rocklike anthills, seemed to leer up at him, waiting.

Circling, he caught the flash of a patch of tiled roofs and whitewashed walls mocking him from the profundity of the sea of greenish light. Surely there would be a pasture, some spot where he could land—but there was none. Almost immediately afterward he swept over the gorge of a mighty river; and hope was born again, only to die when he saw the river's banks were precipices a hundred feet high. Save for a single tree whose lonely dome of foliage was like a tiny oasis, all was endless desert—scattered cattle dying of thirst within sight and hearing of tons of rushing water! With the gas-gauge showing almost empty, he realized he must bail out or die.

BREAK of day with its excitement and hope had blotted the girl completely from mind, but now the memory of her struck him like a slap in the face. He felt outraged. She was somebody he didn't know, not even her name. He could for-

give her for stealing a ride, but not for butting in on the chance of death with only a single 'chute between them.

He looked around, and for an instant he thought she was gone; then he saw her. Helmet and goggles discarded, she lay on the floor, curled into a tight ball.

He managed to catch one of her elbows and shake it. Slowly she uncoiled and raised glassy eyes to his face. The whole story of what had happened to her was written in them, and in the incessant chattering of her teeth. She was too numb to cry out—she had passed beyond fear. He pointed at his bags and shouted at her to drag them within his reach. Crawling on hand and knees, she obeyed. He hoisted them through the window and laid them flat on the left wing. Flying straight at the single flourishing tree, he nosed up the plane and slid them off. The fall of one was broken by the branches; the other struck the ground and burst. That done, he climbed in a steady spiral, and at three thousand feet cut the engine to attend to the girl.

"Here," he said, unsnapping the harness of his 'chute, "put this on and be quick about it." She appeared not to hear, but again obeyed like a robot. "Listen," he continued, thrusting her finger through the ring and crooking it, "climb out on the wing, jump, count ten and then pull. When you land, go to the tree. Hurry!"

"No!" she whispered hoarsely.

"Come along, now—we haven't a second to lose. Remember, count ten and then pull."

She shook her head in violent refusal. In desperation he sank his fingers in her mop of hair, dragged her toward him; and before she could recover her balance, he had bundled her through the window. Once more he repeated his instructions about the 'chute. Then, gritting his teeth, he gave her a push that sent her slithering off the wing. It was by long odds the bravest action of his life, but his heart sank when all too soon he saw a cloud of billowing silk rise so close it brushed the skid. Quickly he cut in the motor, and glancing back as the plane shot away, he caught a glimpse of dangling feet in absurd high-heeled pumps apparently shooting skyward.

He drew a quivering breath of relief—she had all the chance there was, and now it was his turn at what was left. He darted into the gorge of the river, and had started to snake along its course in search of some bit of beach, when a cough

from the motor warned him it was about to conk. He nosed into the chasm, edged in under the easterly cliff and sat her down. The plane spun like a top, but the current drove one wing against the bank. He scrambled out, rushed along the wing and hurled himself into the branches of a stunted tree. Scarcely conscious of the thorns that pierced him in a dozen spots, he clung like an ape and looked down.

WITHIN five seconds he saw what a million tons of water traveling at speed can do to a plane. He saw the flood catch the outer wing and drag it under. Using it as a crunching fulcrum, the river flipped the plane high in the air, then engulfed it upside down. He dragged himself astride the tree-trunk and sat in a daze. There was nothing left to tell how he had landed in the tree—no wreckage, not even a slick of oil.

He felt small as a spot of grease against the inner side of a mighty caldron. Out where light struck into the chasm, the spray was glorified by rainbow hues, but directly beneath, black fangs leaped up as if to rip him from his perch. He gazed upward. The wall back of him bulged out in a towering overhang, and edging the top of the opposite cliff he could see only a narrow band of sky. From the south, echoing through the funnel of the gorge, rolled the thunder of distant falls. Tiny and helpless as a midge, he hung imprisoned within a web of majesty.

Again he took account of himself. Why try to get out? What for? The answer came from the river itself—from the very finality with which it had wiped out his past. At first the message was merely a whisper, but gradually it matched the rumble of the flood and became a mighty shout. He needn't be Huddleston Jones, Junior, if he didn't want to. He could be reborn today into anyone he liked. If he should call himself Hud Honez, it wouldn't even be a lie, for *Honez* was merely the Spanish way of pronouncing *Jones*. The longer he thought, the more gripping grew the prospect. Many a man longs in vain for the chance to start again from scratch. It had been dropped in his lap, and he would be a fool not to play it for what it was worth.

Since he was terribly thirsty, his first move should be to drink. Well, here was water, tons upon tons of it, tearing along beneath his dangling feet. He slipped off his coat, and bending down as far as he could reach, let it hang by one sleeve. The other cuff, barely touching the wa-

ter, only bounced about and dried in the rushing air faster than it could absorb moisture. He hauled it up. For a moment he despaired; then adding the length of his tie to the sleeve, he dropped the coat again, and to his joy felt a pocket catch and fill. The next instant he was all but jerked from the trunk of the tree. Clamping his knee, he saved himself and scrambled back. His coat was gone. Trembling with fright, he stared at the frayed shreds of the tie still gripped in his hand.

That cured him; he forgot he was thirsty and looked around. Though the cliff arched outward above his head, he discovered a perpendicular cleft a few yards away. He considered leaving the pistol and the heavy cartridge-belt behind but thought better of it; who knew what might lie ahead? Testing jutting bits of rock and stunted bushes before he trusted his weight to them, he finally reached the cleft. To his relief, the fault was deep and high. It was like a chimney, open on the side toward the river. It made things easy; and half an hour later he emerged at the top of the cliff.

Gone were the mists of dawn. A merciless sun greeted him, and he halted. He missed the hat Derwent had given him, lost with the plane. Tom Derwent! Two days ago they had torn at each other's ears and knuckled each other's eyes; yet of all the people on earth, Tom alone might worry about him. Shading his eyes, he searched for the domed tree. It stood not far off, mountainous in the blinding light. But he did not start toward it immediately; instead he imagined himself before a mirror.

Dark hair, plastered with sweat. Bloodshot eyes. Torn shirt. Blood on his face, arms and hands where thorns had left their mark. This person was a stranger. With Tom Derwent away from Paitura, slogging along toward Iquitos at a snail's pace, who could so much as guess what had become of Eagle Jones? Who would care? Nobody, not even Tom. Then what was to prevent his starting life all over again as Hud Honez? Only the girl.

Far away, a puff of white silk billowed up from the ground, sank and rose again. Perhaps she was being dragged and battered; perhaps she was dead. Ashamed it was almost a hope, he started forward at a quick pace that slowed abruptly as he drew level with the tree. She was there, sitting with her back against its trunk. Head fallen, legs stretched straight out and arms lax, she was a picture of misery.



But he felt anger rather than pity. Even undamaged, could he ship her back to Paitura? Never; it would be like cutting her throat. But without her, he would have had a chance; with her, he was doomed to stagger under the burden of his old life unless he could find some way to seal her lips.

Throwing himself down in the shade of the tree, he was puzzled as to how he could have thought her beautiful. No wonder the romantic aspects of the situation missed him completely. With her mouth open, her hands scratched, a pointed fingernail broken, and her hair hopelessly tangled, she was a mess—except for the enduring whiteness of her skin; though caked with dust and streaked by tears, her cheeks still held the subdued glow of nacre.

UNDER his gaze she stirred and raised her head. Her eyes opened and looked at him with the vague imperception of a dreamer only half awake.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered. Then he continued sullenly: "Yes, I do. About a thousand miles from where you belong."

Her lower lip trembled, and her eyes stared unseeing as she murmured: "And about a thousand years."

"Whose fault is that?" he asked sharply. "Do you suppose I wouldn't give my right arm to toss you back where you came from? You got yourself into this—now tell me what I'm to do with you."

She shook her head from side to side. "Anything," she replied.

"Anything!" he cried. "How does that help? Can you imagine what Paitura will be saying from now till one of us dies?"

Again her head moved from side to side as she drew up her knees and locked her hands around them. "Does it matter?" She answered the question herself. "No; after last night, I can't cry, and I'll never scream again. All is finished; nothing matters."

"Out of all the millions of people on earth," he said bitterly, "it matters only to me. I'm handcuffed—nailed to the cross. What you've managed to do is to cut me off from the known world."

"You saved my life at the risk of your own," she said wonderingly, "and you don't like me. To be rid of me, all you had to do was to jump yourself. The airplane would have fallen and burned. I would have died without knowing I was dying—without anybody knowing."

"Except me. I'd have felt fine for the rest of my life, wouldn't I?" He scowled. "Tell me why you sneaked into my ship? Why?"

"Arnaldo," she answered dully. "He swaggered around. He became impossible. All day long he would talk about his

Idelfonso deposited the girl atop the tiniest donkey; the little beast promptly minced its way to the head of the line.



flight as if it had made him into a god. I'm eighteen. All my life I've done nothing. I've read about girls in other places, and seen pictures of what they wear."

"So that's what gave you the idea."

"Yes. I hid the helmet and goggles, and told Arnaldo you had sent for them. I knew that some day you would come. Why be angry with me? The thought in my head was so small, so simple. I had heard you often up in the air, and never for more than an hour at a time. I meant only to ride with you and then run home. If you continued to think I was Arnaldo, it would have been well. But had you found me out after the ride, what could you have done about it?"

"Nothing," said Hud. "Nothing but thank God."

She swept her eyes to his sullen face and dropped them. Her hands opened outward and down in a vivid gesture. "You have lost only your airplane," she whispered, her lips trembling. "I have lost everything. Why are you angry?"

He had no answer. His eyes went from her hands to her face and then to the

trunk of the tree. It was an imbu and had been deeply hacked with an ax. What a crime, he thought, not knowing that only thus could it have been forced to hold its leaves through the long drought. The noble tree cast a shade like a circular blot. Faint paths went from it and came toward it. Cattle drew near soundlessly out of the scrubby desert and stood in a ring, their mild eyes protesting at the presence of strangers. One could have used their bones for hatracks. Thorns from the cactus they had been trying to eat dangled from their lax muzzles. They seemed carved out of sandstone.

THE stillness beyond the limit of the circle of shade had sound and smell as though pebbles, twigs and the leafless scrub were frying in the sun. The quiet was broken by a faint tinkle. Hud sprang to his feet and faced the sound.

A troop of diminutive burros came into sight, approached with finical little steps and crowded into the shade of the tree. Each was laden with the kerosene tins which dot the uttermost reaches of the globe; but no smell of oil came from them. They were loosely corked with trusses of green grass; and suspecting the truth, he soon discovered water, gallons of water. He snatched the plug from one of the tins and tipped it for the girl to drink, then drank himself.

Unnoticed, the *tropeiro* in charge of the donkeys arrived and stood looking on. He wore a conical homemade hat of woven fiber, cotton trousers held up by a thong of rawhide, and leather sandals. In his left hand was a staff, and at his side hung a huge sheath-knife. The hairless skin of his face and naked torso were burned to a deep even brown. When Hud chanced finally to glance at him, the man bowed with bent knees and made a quaint dipping gesture with his right hand.

"*Bençao, meo sen'o, bençao!*"

"*Vaya con Dios;*" answered the girl.

"What did he say?" asked Hud. "That wasn't Spanish."

"The words meant nothing to me," she replied, "but his gesture asked a blessing, and I gave it."

Hud frowned. "I've got it," he said presently. "He must have spoken in Portuguese, and that means we're somewhere in Brazil."

"Brazil!" she exclaimed unbelievingly; then her face saddened. "We are far away."

By a system of trial and error, she and the man could arrive at each other's

meaning, and presently the three of them started gathering up Hud's scattered belongings. They trussed them in the shattered bag and rescued its mate from the branches of the tree. The *tropeiro*, who declared his name to be Idelfonso, perched the suitcases atop the loads of two of the little donkeys and bound them securely with halter ropes of horsehair. The cavalcade started off, and as they walked, the man tossed off bits of information. The ranch toward which they traveled was called Fazenda do Macho, and its owner was known far and wide as Dom Bolim. The main house was nearby, but the *fazenda* itself was beyond measure, since its limits were greater than the spread between the rising and the setting sun.

"That's silly," commented Hud when the girl had translated.

"Only because you don't understand, Señor Honez," she said. "I will explain. He means that a man, starting at dawn and traveling until the setting of the sun, cannot reach the ends of this hacienda."

From the sky the huddle of ranch-houses had seemed merely a patch of brown tiles; now, like a distant mirage, it took on the semblance of a great walled city. But it was still far away and soon the girl began to falter. Noticing she lagged, Idelfonso picked her up and deposited her on top the canister of the tiniest donkey. The little beast was incredibly strong. Far from staggering, he promptly minced his way to the head of the line. As the cavalcade approached, what had seemed so great a city shrank to its true proportions—a low-roofed square at the head of a long colonnade of leafless gum trees.

At close sight of it Hud experienced a shock. The place puzzled him, and he sought a word. *Mystery* did not fit; nor did *squalor*; it was something midway between. There was no grandeur, yet he was moved by a sense of space and power. But it was power so shrouded in the remembered green light of the dawn that he could not discover its face nor determine whether it stood for good or evil.

Chapter Five

DELFINSO opened the great gate and they entered a paved court lined on three sides by sheds, storehouses, stables, tack-room, blacksmith shop and servants' dwellings. The fourth side, directly ahead, was entirely taken up by the

façade of the master's house. It alone rose to two stories but was so broad it looked squat. Midway down, the roof of its veranda slanted out in the style of a Dutch apron, only much wider. People of every color and age loafed in the shade along one side of the court or scurried across the sunlight on some errand. A pack of scrawny dogs followed by a troop of children totally innocent of clothing rushed in a yapping mass to surround the invading strangers. Using his staff on curs and children alike, Idelfonso plowed a way through to the main house and started to unload the suitcases and tins of water. He told the girl to tell Hud to walk in without ceremony.

Hud stepped on the clay-floored veranda, only inches higher than the level of the court. High solid doors, now open, were spaced to right and left along its full length. He passed through the central one, the girl close at his heels, and found himself in an entry which gave on a room of baronial proportions. Just within its threshold he paused, uncertain of the formula for announcing one's self in a private town hall. Though several persons were present, nobody seemed to have noticed his arrival.

Across one end of the room stretched a huge dining-table, and along the walls stood the ubiquitous bentwood chairs of all South America. There were no floor coverings but ponderous valances capped the windows and from them hung straight drapes of cochineal red, the only note of color. At the end opposite the big table a group of people gave the impression of some sort of tribunal in session. A white-headed old man, a very old man, was seated in a big hand-hewn armchair and in spite of the heat had a rug tucked around his knees. He was unmistakably not a native. His skin, like transparent parchment, was yellowed only by age and he had the nose and eyes of an eagle.

Around him were scattered four younger men, also white but with a difference. They looked unhealthy, as if the red corpuscles had been drained from their blood. They were dressed in tunics and trousers of homespun, bleached white. Three of them wore fantastic riding-boots, wide-topped and decorated with stitched arabesques. The bare feet of the fourth were thrust into heelless slippers. They all shared an air of waiting, as though they had been waiting for some particular thing for a long time.

In sharp contrast to their clothes were those of the gangling, lantern-jawed in-

dividual who faced the old man. He wore a cheap hand-me-down suit with trousers saddleworn threadbare inside the knees, a bright red tie and a dirty shirt. Under his arm he carried a conventional straw hat, yellow and badly dented. Hud's eyes passed beyond him and promptly became fixed on a young girl. She was dressed in homespun, but in nothing else did she resemble the four waiting men. A tight-fitting bodice broke out from her waist into a bouffant skirt that hung so low it hid her feet.

THERE was something so satisfying about her that Hud felt lightheaded, like a man who has taken a quick drink on an empty stomach. After the sort of thing he had seen and known at home it was absurd that this girl in her odd gown should have such an effect on him. Yet, drunk or sober, the longer he looked at her the more insistent became the inner voice of judgment. She was alive, youth masquerading in the past. She wore gravity like a mantle, but beneath it was laughter imprisoned in a web of silence. Even her skin, with pale freckles saddling her nose, suggested suppressed gayety. It gave off a golden light that tinged her hazel eyes and flickered over her smooth yellow hair.

Without being beautiful she was lovely. If some god had bidden him dream a girl to his taste he would have dreamed this girl just as she stood. He wished she would look at him if only for a second but she was absorbed in watching the man with the red tie, who seemed to be on trial. Apparently the old gentleman in the big chair was still unconscious of Hud and his companion; in any case he ignored them. He addressed the culprit and so familiar was the sound of his slurring speech that moments passed before Hud realized he was listening to English.

"I recollect," said the old man, "you told me your name is Jackman."

"That's correct, sir. Amos Jackman. A humble itinerant preacher, sir. An emissary to the idolatrous sent out by the generosity of a few kind friends."

The old gentleman folded his arms across his middle and leaned forward. "Mr. Jackman," he said, "it's seventy years to a day since I rode into Fazenda do Macho with a bride on the crupper. There were quite a lot of us seventy years ago—Meltons, Wrights, Reardons, McCraes—but mostly Brechts. We had an idea any place would be good enough to live in if we could just keep on owning

slaves. Around here they call me Dom Bolim, but at home it would have been Boling Brecht of Bolingbrook—and I can smell a cracker a mile off. When did you arrive?"

"Eight days ago, Mr. Brecht," muttered Jackman.

"Well, Amos, owing to the general poorness of this region there's an unwritten law older than I am that says a traveler should bring his own food and ask to have it cooked. According to your own accounting you and your mule have been living on me for a week and a day. So here's your choice. Either you start cutting cactus for your board along with the rest of the hands, or you clear out. . . . Which will it be?"

"I'll stay, sir."

"Good. Show a little snap and perhaps we'll make you a *capataz*. That's all." As Jackman backed away and started for the door Mr. Brecht motioned to Hud to come forward. "Now you, sir," he said. "The way you're dressed I take it you understand English."

"I ought to," said Hud, "I'm an American, sir, and my name is Hud Honez."

"Honez," repeated Mr. Brecht. "I used to know some Honeys but I never heard of a Honez. Northerner, I suppose."

"Yes sir."

"Queer names in the North. You're badly scratched. Horse throw you?"

"No, sir," said Hud with a smile. "I have no horse and I'm sorry to say I'm another traveler who hasn't brought his own provisions. You see, I didn't mean to come here. I'm a flyer. I dropped on your property from the sky."

Old Mr. Brecht's face underwent an astonishing transformation. It became suffused with faint pink, his eyebrows met in a scowl and his deep eyes seemed actually to bulge. Blue veins stood out on the backs of his hands as he gripped the arms of the chair to draw himself forward.

"Liar!" he whispered.

Hud was too astonished to speak. The four male bystanders shuffled their feet and smirked, not from uneasiness but as though pleased at his discomfiture. The blonde girl, however, moved swiftly to the old man's side and laid an arm across his shoulders.

"Oh, Grandfather, you mustn't," she pleaded; "it isn't good for you. Besides, you've done a terrible thing. This young man spoke the truth. He is a flyer. You heard him at dawn this morning; we all heard him. You know men fly—we've

told you over and over again. It's true he dropped from the sky."

The old man sank back under the urging of her arm. His head drooped but presently his chin went up and to Hud's surprise there was a twinkle in his rheumy eyes. "Belief comes easy to the young but hard to the old," he said. "Young man, Boling Brecht offers you his most humble apologies. According to my granddaughter Frances, it appears that unlike all other men, you are not a liar."

Hud laughed aloud. The girl smiled, smoothed her grandfather's head caressingly and drew back. She looked at Hud as if she were only just seeing him and an odd expression came into her eyes. It was scarcely fright but suggested a wonder she was too naïve to hide. He was strange to her, a being outside the range of her conception. She glanced around the room and at the other men as if only the support of familiar things could steady her. She could quit looking at Hud but couldn't escape the sound of his voice. It too was strange: there was no drawl to it, no dying away through inertia. It startled her with its echo of the youth and courage in her own heart.

"Call me anything you like, Mr. Brecht," it was saying. "You can't imagine the kick I'm getting out of this. Do you really mean you've never seen an airplane? Not even this morning?"

"Please," said Frances anxiously, but her grandfather hushed her with a wave of his hand.

"Let him talk," he said, "I like to hear him. If he came in an airplane I can go out and look at it, can't I? If that doesn't cure me I can feel it and kick it. But later. Give the boy a chance to wash up first. Show him a room, Frances, and send his servant to the *posada*."

AGAIN Hud had managed to forget his unwelcome companion; but he recovered himself and interjected quickly: "She isn't a servant, sir."

"She?" exclaimed Mr. Brecht. Every head turned toward the girl still standing near the entrance door. She had understood no word of what had been said and her expression hovered between bewilderment and exhaustion. Her eyes brightened as Hud motioned her to come forward. "A girl, eh?" continued old Mr. Brecht. "Your wife, I suppose?"

"Wife?" gasped Hud. "No, sir." As he realized the size of the task before him he began to redden. "Mr. Brecht," he plunged, "I don't even know her name."

"You take a young girl around with you without knowing her name?"

"You must believe me, sir," said Hud earnestly. "Only yesterday she hid in my plane over a thousand miles away from here. When I found it out, a hundred-mile gale was blowing me east and I couldn't get back; I tried, but I couldn't. Listen, sir. I'll prove I scarcely know her. I'll ask her her name and you can watch how she answers." He faced the girl.

"*Diga-me, señorita, come se llama usted?*" he asked.

"Paca," she answered after a curious pause.

"She says her name is Paca."

"Paca what?" demanded the old man.

"*Y que mas?*" asked Huddleston.

"*Paca será todo mi nombre, hoy y para siempre.*"

"She says Paca must be her only name, now and forever," translated Hud. "I knew her brother well, sir; it was he taught me Spanish. I suppose I've heard his surname a dozen times, but I never learned it, never used it once, so I can't possibly remember it now."

"Over a thousand miles!" murmured Mr. Brecht out of a semi-trance. "Yesterday you were over a thousand miles away!"

Frances came forward, touched Paca lightly on the shoulder and motioned toward a door. Paca gave her a swift glance, then fastened her gaze on Hud's face. Before he could guess what she was about, much less move, she sank before him, wrapped her arms around his knees and buried her face against them. He was ashamed, angry and powerless; his agonized eyes met Frances' eyes and saw the look in them change from doubt to distaste and from distaste into accusation. Others might believe there had been nothing between him and the Spanish girl, but not she, for she could measure the actions of women only by her own impulses. Under what compulsion would she have embraced a man's knees? Color stained her cheeks as she turned and walked swiftly from the room.

No sooner had she gone than Hud found himself released. Paca rose. To his astonishment her expression was calm, almost triumphant, the satisfied look of a fighter who has won the first round in a long battle. The suspicion that jealousy had been her motive enraged him. What right had she to be jealous? His hands opened and closed; they longed to seize her throat and shake her.

"Go after her," he ordered sharply. "You can make anybody understand when you want to. Tell her the truth. If you don't I'll go away from here and go alone. I'll clear out in the middle of the night and leave you. Take your choice."

She shrugged and walked off, but he had no faith in her and felt depressed. He started to follow, changed his mind and sat down. The four younger men had long since settled into chairs. Two of them were scraping cornhusks paper-thin, preparatory to rolling cigarettes. A third, motionless, was staring blankly at the floor. The fourth, the man in slippers, had his eyes fixed intently on the old man's face. All four retained their air of waiting.

"I like you, boy," said Mr. Brecht, "but I can't stomach that name *Honez*."

"Then forget it," said Hud. "Call me Hud."

"Hud, eh? Yes, that's better. Well, Hud, we might as well top off the naming business. These four leeches, counting from your left, are Reardon Brecht, Boling Black, Wilbur Brecht and Felton McCrae. You notice they're waiting. Can you guess what for?"

"No, sir," murmured Hud, wishing himself out of the room.

MR. BRECHT chuckled. "For years they've just been waiting for me to die!"

Hud swept his eyes along the line of faces. He saw no change in expression, for the spring of expression had dried up at its source. The old man lifted a finger, pointed and dropped it.

"That's Reardon Brecht, my grandnephew. Reardon must be around forty. He broke the tribal rule. He married a native without tracing her antecedents back to the fourth generation—and got a surprise. His children can't come in the house, nor their mother—not any more."

Reardon Brecht licked the edge of his cigarette, folded it at both ends, rose and walked from the room. He had bulk without strength, motion devoid of energy. At his going the old man's eyes crinkled with joy.

"The next is Boling Black," he continued, "named after me. He's a cousin to Reardon—they're all cousins, worse luck. I don't mind a white man not working if he can make others work. That's what a gentleman is for—to get the most out of the people under him. Boling didn't fly the coop like Reardon. He married a



second cousin the way he ought, but she up and died in childbirth. That's the only lick of work he ever got out of anybody."

Boling followed Reardon, the old man waving him out gayly. "Now we come to Wilbur. He's another Brecht and so is his wife, but she's so poorly she's never left her room since the honeymoon. Leaving Reardon's litter out of the count there's not a boy on the place to carry on the name. Look at Wilbur—no more crow in him than in a dish of pap." Wilbur moved slowly, as if only the half of him had heard, but he went.

"Who's still here?" proceeded Mr. Brecht relentlessly. "Felton McCrae, the youngest of the lot and the laziest. Sitting there staring at me, thinking the same thing hour after hour and knowing I know what it is. He's waiting harder than the rest of them because it means more to him. That's what he's doing—waiting."

Malevolence gleamed in Felton McCrae's eyes but swiftly died. He rose and shuffled off, his slippers making a dragging sound. With a satisfied sigh the old man sank back.

Hud was puzzled. If Paitura had seemed a strange world, here was a stranger one: a world going to rot. He moved uneasily but before he could rise Mr. Brecht spoke again.

"You're wondering why I should have shamed my name before a stranger, Hud, and I'll tell you why. Because you're a man, and it's a long time since I've seen a man. I like you; I liked you the minute I laid eyes on you. I wanted a chance to talk, just us two. New ears. Blood in your veins. Eyes that see." He took a fresh grip on the arms of the chair and leaned forward. "The year the war ended I was eighteen, younger than you are now but a lot older since already I'd had a year of fighting. But where was my

father? He was in London, getting ready to outfit a successor to the *Alabama*. Do you begin to smell something?"

"No, sir. All I ever knew about the *Alabama* was that England had to pay a lot of claims long afterward."

"Shucks," said Mr. Brecht. "How do you suppose we Brechts, father and son, could have bought Fazenda do Macho, a tract a hundred miles square? Hud, you've just come here, you haven't washed yet, but I'm going to tell you something no living mortal knows but me."

"Don't, sir," said Hud quickly. "You may be sorry later."

"Later? Later may be too late any day now. Besides, it will do me good to get it off my chest. Naturally my father wouldn't have stolen the funds in London from the Confederacy, but the way it happened, there wasn't any Confederacy left. Now do you get it?"

"Yes," said Hud. "But it was like keeping something you've found when you know the rightful owner can never turn up to claim it."

"**N**ICE way to put it, and I'm grateful," said Mr. Brecht. He paused, his mind wandering into the past. "There were some hundreds came chasing across the equator looking for the freedom to do as we pleased." He paused again to utter a cackle. "The American Minister in Rio sure was scared. He wrote the Secretary of State how a hundred thousand families were on their way from the Southern States to settle here in Brazil. Well, quite some hundreds of us came, but I doubt if, counting men, women and children, we touched the thousand mark. Ever hear of a town back of São Paulo a thousand miles south of here called Santa Barbara?"

"No, sir."

"That's where the biggest lot of us settled," said Mr. Brecht sadly, "and after all these years you never even heard of it. But my father was too canny to go along with them and show the measure of his cash. Our crowd—uncles, aunts, cousins and back-home neighbors—branched off up here. This river we're on is the San Francisco. I'm told how it has about the fifth greatest falls and the longest gorge, bar one, in the whole world. We bought Fazenda do Macho after the rains when it was a paradise of green."

"But it's a desert!" exclaimed Hud.

"Then we found out the rains come once in three years," stated the old man grimly. "Cut off like we were, you can

see how we soon had to quit the nonsense of marrying for love long ago and figure out blood-strains on a scale. The right cousin had to marry the right cousin or never marry at all. Look at Reardon."

Again he paused, but only to stow the breath to go on. "There's a funny thing about freedom, Hud. Transplant it and it don't live long away from its own sort, your own people, and somehow it don't seem to be a hothouse plant. When I look around at what's left of the Brechts, all except Frances, I wonder—I wonder—Well, Frances is the only man of the lot. She's the one runs the whole place. Wait till you see her dressed like a *caipira*, togged out in her cowboy outfit. Outside of her, Pounce and me are the only men left. His dam was my mammy; we were nursed at the same breast, Pounce and me." He nodded, caught himself and continued drowsily. "Out of the sky! Who would have thought of that? Who would have waited for something out of the sky? Too bad you couldn't have come along sooner, Hud." He fell asleep.

Hud found that a servant was waiting to show him to his room. The man was barefoot, dressed only in trousers. Carrying the suitcases he led the way upstairs, opened a door and departed. Hud examined everything curiously. Basin, ewer and stand were of enameled metal but all else was homemade—the black ball of soap, the cotton towels, the bed with woven rawhide strips for a mattress, a ponderous wardrobe, a table and chair, the hand-hewn boards of the floor and shutters. There was no ceiling, only the tiles of the roof. Through the single window he saw a thicket of bamboos, green at the base but with its higher plumes dry and rattling in the hot breeze. Between him and the massed clump of trees a nondescript procession of workers was passing, each armed with a sheath knife as big as a machete. They were on their way to hack down cactus, trim it of thorns and fetch it in as fodder for the home stock. He recognized Jackman's angular figure and smiled.

TURNING from the window, he unpacked his bags, shaved and sponged from head to foot. He tasted the water. It was bitter and undrinkable, not the river water Idelfonso had brought. Just as he finished changing into sneakers and a soft shirt the servant brought black coffee with crisp rusks made of mandioc flour. Only at the first taste of food did he realize how hungry he had been. He

ate the rusks to the last crumb and went downstairs. The broad veranda formed a sort of no-man's land between the great house and the court. Within its shade cleanliness held sway; beyond was the teeming life of a microcosm complete to the last detail, including barnyard stock and droppings. Intending to take a walk he started toward the gate, but was brought to a halt every few steps by some fresh discovery.

Through everything he saw ran the same basic thread. It eluded him at first but presently he could give it a name. It was self-sufficiency, the power of simple methods to meet the needs of man. He felt transported into a time that is past. Within the sprawling principality of Fazenda do Macho—where the *cafetal* with its sombre coffee trees might be thirty miles from the sugar-cane bottom—if you wanted something made of cotton you planted the seed and by a natural and leisurely process arrived in due course at a tablecloth. The same sort of thing went for coffee, sugar, charcoal, dyes, tobacco, tallow, beef and most of all for hides. He was engrossed by the tack-room, a veritable leather factory. Besides articles already in use, sandals, saddles and saddle-packs, thongs for every purpose, jackets, trousers and even heavy flat-rimmed hats were in various stages of completion. Not for the general market but because some particular person needed that particular thing. The blacksmith shop worked to the same exact end, making no extra bolt.

WHEN he found the well from which must have come the bitter water in which he had washed he discovered something else; the corral stock and laboring people didn't like it but they had learned to drink it and live. He peered into every face he met, puzzled by some lack shared by every man, woman and child. When he discovered what it was he laughed, for what was missing was discontent. Here was life stripped to the bare bone of the needful, yet people weren't unhappy. When he laughed a dozen of them smiled in spontaneous answer and a little colored boy rushed up to him and took his hand.

They tried to talk, but while the boy seemed to understand, Hud couldn't. The boy frowned, then his face brightened and he began to tug and point. Hud went with him. They entered a big room, clay-floored and windowless to keep out the heat and dust. In the light from the door

an old Negro, his kinky hair snow-white, sat on a stool. Beside him was a pot over a slow fire and before him a great wheel, horizontal to the ground. Spaced along it hung cotton wicks and as it turned he poured down them melted tallow from the pot. He was making candles.

"Pounce," cried the boy excitedly, "diga—"

He stopped as though his breath had been cut off with a knife, squirmed his moist little hand free, turned and walked sedately out and away. Hud wondered what on earth could have happened. He looked after him curiously, then down at the old negro more curiously still.

"So you're Pounce," he said. "Do you talk English?"

"Yas-sir, yas-sir."

"Who is that little boy? What is his name?"

The old darky did not answer at once. His blood-shot eyes cast a hasty look toward the interior of the room and trouble seemed to settle into each crease of his deeply lined face. "He's one of Master Reardon's get," he muttered finally. "But they calls him Riso on account he was born smiling."

Then Hud too peered into the shadows and felt his heart almost stop. Now that his pupils had had a chance to dilate it seemed incredible he could have been so blind. A vision in white stood there, glorified and revealed by its own pale light. Both Frances' hands were tightly clasped at her waist. She was standing erect with her head held high, but sadness filled her face. Her eyes were not looking at him; they were fixed on the spot where Riso had stood.

"Miss Brecht," said Hud earnestly, "I'm glad you're here. I want to talk to you. I've got to talk to you, and you must believe all I say."

A SWIFT change passed through her, giving him a strange illusion. She became two people—a shell that was fixed like a mold and glowing within it another woman, a prisoner with frightened eyes and pulsing blood. The prisoner looked out at him, called to him, declared herself to be one with himself in hope and aspiration and in the miracle of the suddenly opened human heart. But when her trembling lips steadied and spoke it was the shell that answered him, only the fixed mold.

"I'm not Miss Brecht," said Frances. "I'm married to Felton McCrae."

LADY No Longer

Sailor-men ashore in Florida get into wild and weird trouble.

MR. PETER ORDE, mate of the *Castletron*, had considered himself lucky when he and Herb Doran had each been awarded a thousand dollars for their part in a dangerous salvage job. Now he knew that getting that thousand had been a tough break. Not only was the thousand gone, but Mr. Orde had a bet with himself that his job was going down wind after it. And this was the zero moment.

He hailed the bridge, reporting the *Castletron* properly moored alongside the refrigerating-plant dock. At once Captain Slater came down the ladder, an avalanche of fat. Captain Slater jabbed Peter Orde with an eye as mean as a tarantula bite.

"Get going, Mister," said the Old Man, jerking a thick finger at the Florida shore. "And if you want to come back, come back with that money."

"I'll get it, sir," Mr. Orde assured Captain Slater. "Herb Doran merely took my thousand with him by mistake. It was my fault. He thought I wanted him to look after it for me."

Captain Slater snorted. "It was my money—not yours!" he snapped. "I had made the deal with you!"

Peter Orde knew his explanation sounded thin. But how could he admit that when Herb Doran, the giddy young fool, jumped ship last voyage he had practically stolen Peter's thousand? All he had left was a scrawled note of airy assurance that he would double the money, along with his own, among Florida's many opportunities. Sincere—but sappy.

"I'll dig up Doran and be back with the money long before sailing-time," Mr.



Orde said to the Captain. It was more of a prayer than a statement.

The chance that Doran had anything left after a month ashore was as remote as Betelgeuse. But how could Peter accuse Herb Doran to the Old Man after the bitter peril they had gone through to earn that money? They had saved each other's lives half a dozen times.

"I sold you my stock," said Captain Slater. He was fond of repeating it. "You defaulted. I want my money. If I thought you were welshing on the deal or if the Line heard—"

"I'm not welshing," said Peter Orde. "I'll be back with the money."

"Mates are a dime a dozen these days." Captain Slater dug in his eye again. "I could fill your shoes as fast as I filled Doran's. Take your duffel ashore with you."

His laugh was as mean as his eye. "That'll save you a long walk to the ship if you don't get the money. We sail at nine P.M."

Peter Orde left the *Castletron*. A fired chief officer in Florida would be lucky to get a ship as third mate. He'd lose years of his career if he didn't find Doran.



By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

He tightened his jaw as he swung his bag along the broad road from Port Everglades. He felt lonely. A ship was company. She was all he had. No wife, no kids, no home, no other money—nothing but his job. He must run down Herb Doran. He had a chance—a slim one, but a chance.

He found a cab. At Fort Lauderdale he left his gear at a bus station. He dropped into a white stucco cocktail lounge. There he and Herb Doran had downed a drink or two on the few occasions when they had had leave together in that port. The barkeep couldn't even remember Herb Doran, although Herb was six-feet-three and a prominent object in any man's bar.

"They come bigger'n that, Capt'n," he told Peter Orde. "But big or little, they come an' they go."

BEFORE he ran out of places around Lauderdale Peter Orde was afraid he had had one too many. He had looked hard and long, at one drink per place. Hastily he abandoned bars. He found a restaurant near the bridge where the charter boats, which caught fish during the day, hung up their sailfish on racks

and caught sportsmen during the evening. He tried a few questions about Herb Doran on the charter-boat captains. But it was his waiter who answered one.

"You been going around to the wrong kind o' drinking-places, Captain," the waiter told him. "I remember that big sailor. What he went in for was fruit juices."

"Fruit juices?"

The waiter nodded. "Down the Federal near Port Everglades," he said. "Hardy's Fruit Juice Stand—it's a big place where you can buy a carload of oranges, a crate of guava jelly, nuts by the piece or ton—a big place."

"Fruit juices," said Peter Orde, with growing understanding. "Who's the girl?"

"That runs it? Kathleen Hardy."

"Florida girl?"

"Springfield, Mass. She built the place up with her father. He used to get pneumonia up North every winter. And just when she got the place pulling, he died, o' heart-failure, on her. That's life, aint it? Life!"

Peter Orde agreed, and left....

Back on the Federal highway near Port Everglades, he stopped abruptly in his hunt for Hardy's. From the port,

borne by the easterly trade breeze, he heard a ship blowing a long blast. He would have known that note in a desert. It was the *Castletron*, on her way. The Old Man hadn't waited for him ten minutes past sailing-time. He always meant what he said, Captain Slater did.

"You always know where you are with Slater," Peter Orde said. "Nowhere!"

He looked around for somebody to repeat this to, but saw nobody. Mistily but surely he knew he had a stronger reason than ever to find Herb Doran and his thousand now. He was on the beach, a shipless seaman.

With an effort he walked on and located Hardy's.

Hardy's was quite a sizable place; its roadside-stand beginning was still proudly accentuated. It was open, though now it was past nine o'clock. Several young men were consuming the juice of citrus fruits. A languid youth supplied Peter Orde with orange juice. Peter stood and looked at the paper cup while making guarded inquiries.

THE languid young man didn't know anything about Herb Doran or much about anything else. He did know that Miss Hardy was back in the office. He pointed the way past the preserved-fruit counter.

Kathleen Hardy, a dark-haired girl, had both elbows on the desk. Her sun-browned chin was cupped between her palms. She was reading a book—not an account-book, but a novel.

There was a hard competence about this girl that didn't please him. She gave him quite a going-over; and she was not only serious but thoughtful.

"You're off the *Castletron* and looking for your old friend Herb Doran," she repeated. "And your name is Orde."

She looked at him again, with more interest. Except for Gulf Stream water just at sunset, her eyes were the darkest blue that Peter had ever seen.

"Orde!" she repeated. "Why, you must be Killer Orde! Herb's told me all about you. Killer Orde, the bucko mate."

"Me!" Peter Orde was outraged. "Killer Orde! Why, I'll knock that lying swanboat sailor endways the minute I get my hands on him! I can keep discipline without bucko stuff. Any good man can. I'll break his neck."

"Make up your mind, Killer," said Kathleen Hardy. "Are you knocking him endways or breaking his neck?"

"Both! Where is he?"

"He has stopped here occasionally for a glass of orange juice,"—she sniffed,— "although if he's a friend of yours I'll admit that does sound unlikely. But I don't know anything about him. Try the bars—again."

"Look!" said Peter Orde. "I'm not lit. I've had a few—but I'm not lit."

She nodded and stood up. "You aren't lit. And you aren't getting anywhere about Herb Doran. So why not remedy the omission by going out and getting lit? I'm busy."

"You're not busy. And I can tell that you know what happened to Herb Doran. I want to know!"

Something warned him he must be very tough with this competent-looking young woman. He stretched out his hand and gripped her wrist.

The novel was nearest to her fingers. She hit him violently with it. Her eyes snapped. Shocked at this exhibition, he let her wrench her arm away.

"You needn't be afraid of me," he said. "That 'Killer' thing is Herb Doran's guff."

"I'm not afraid of you; I'm afraid I'll tear you into little pieces," she blazed.

"I want to know where Herb Doran is," he insisted.

She seemed about to eject him by force of personality, coupled with a little muscular force. But suddenly she stopped.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked.

Peter Orde scowled. "For his own good."

"Oh, for his own good," the girl said, as if that meant something. "Sit down, Killer."

She assisted him in his decision to comply by pushing him into her swivel-chair. She sat on the desk.

"I didn't know it was for his own good," she said winningly. "Why didn't you say so?"

"I did say so," he said. "We're getting somewhere now. Naturally I want to know. For my own good."

NO longer was there any question of his being thrown out or even hit with a book.

The girl settled down and she and Peter had a nice talk, full of revelations. He explained that Herb Doran was a nice kid, if you could get him to grow up. They got the whole thing all straightened out. Only when the youth up front came back to mention that it was closing-time did Peter get up to leave. And then, as

she said good night to him, something hidden in his consciousness popped up.

"But you haven't told me where Herb is—what happened to him," he protested. "Why, you haven't told me a thing! Not a thing! And I've told you—I've told you everything!"

"And what!" she said. "All right; I'll tell you something."

Her eyes were snapping again. "Go back to your ship—for your own good, Killer."

He sat down again. He hit the desk a whack with his fist that nearly stove it in. "I don't move till you tell me where he is. I'm going to get him out of your clutches."

She flared like a match. "Go—or I'll throw you out!" she cried. "Herb Doran is just a great big irresponsible boy! He's no thief!"

"I didn't say he was anything but a minnow-brained—" he began.

In no time at all several young men who had been drinking the juice of citrus fruits out front arrived on the run. They ganged up on Peter Orde and ran him out of the place. While Peter was fighting his mightiest he fell asleep. That was the unfortunate way things had been going with him during his inquiries.

When he awakened on the side platform of the store, Hardy's was dark and uncommunicative. His hat was on his chest—a womanly touch! Sadly he started walking toward Fort Lauderdale.

He came to a sign on a little white house, "GUESTS ACCOMMODATED." He stopped wearily. A few minutes later an elderly couple with big eyes contemplated him from the doorway. They conferred behind the door and decided to let him come in.

IN the morning he felt terrible. He hadn't felt that way since he'd won his ticket as third mate. It was a dreary world, difficult to move around in, with no life underfoot, as in a ship. Not even the fact that he had made a sizable dent in the mystery of Herb Doran cheered him up. He borrowed a razor from the old man, dressed and hurried down the Federal to Hardy's.

It was open; it had the air of having been open a long time. He looked without enthusiasm at a paper cup of orange juice that some girl—not Kathleen Hardy—placed before him.

While he was sitting there the girl went away and Kathleen Hardy appeared. She smiled at him.



She flared like a match. "Go, or I'll throw you out!" she cried.

"Good morning, Killer," she said. "Have you found out where the *Castleton* got to? What a ship that must be!"

"There's nothing wrong with the ship." Peter was gruff about it. "And don't call me Killer."

"Will Sir Alcohol of the Quest do? Or how about Killie?"

"My name is Peter Orde," he said stiffly. He weakened after another glance at the cold orange juice. "I feel terrible. Would that stuff cure a hangover?"

"I'm sure it would, but there's coffee coming in case you prefer it. Drunks do."

He stood up. "That's not funny," he said. "I wasn't as—as far gone last night as you thought. I remember you pumping me dry about Herb Doran. That was hardly sporting."

"It was fun, though," she said.

"I've come this morning to apologize to you for grabbing your wrist last night. And I've also come to ask you to tell me where I can reach Herb Doran."

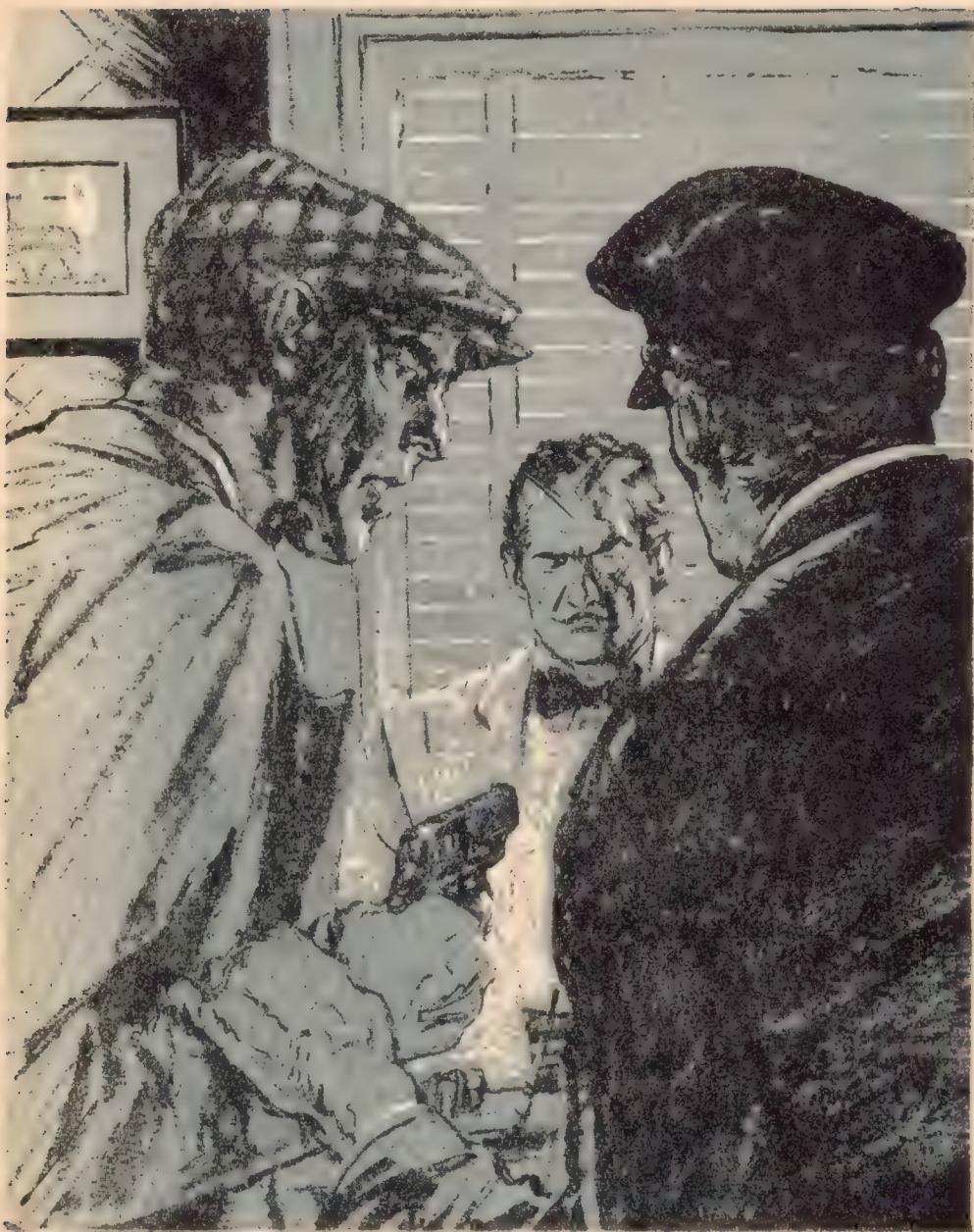
She shook her head. "You should have apologized prettily first, about the wrist. Then, gradually, you could have worked around to Herb Doran."

Back of her light-mindedness he felt something serious. This girl was worried about Herb or about his own mission.

"I'm not working around to anything gradually," he said. "I want to know where Herb Doran is."

She thrust out her arm. "Try twisting it," she suggested.

His head felt worse than ever, what with the blood crowding hotly up into it. "I've seen girls all over the world," he said. "You're the nastiest I've ever met. Must I go to the police to find out where Herb Doran is?"



"Easy, Herb!" he said. . . . And to Carnahan: **"Are you willing to settle for a thousand?"**

"It might be a good idea," she said gravely. "You'd find I stole your thousand and his thousand, then put him in pickle to sell as rattlesnake meat. Think hard! Wasn't there some girl somewhere some time who was just the weeniest bit nastier than I am?"

He had too many things to say and too many feelings churning around inside him to speak. He turned his back on Kathleen and the girl coming with the coffee and walked away.

"If she thinks she'll stop me from finding Herb Doran she's daffier than she acts," he told himself. "But why do they all fall for Herb?"

He flagged a bus and rode into Fort Lauderdale to get coffee. When his head felt better he felt worse all over. After all, he had insulted the confounded girl while lit, even though altruistically lit. And then, when very cold sober, he had acted even worse. And she had been having some coffee made for him!

"I ought to go back and apologize to her," he told himself. "No, if I go back I'll probably hit her with a rock."

After breakfast he tried a few places around town—dry places like lunch-rooms, fishing-boats and stores. It was quite clear to him that Herb Doran had lingered around this part of Florida long enough to make a distinct impression on Kathleen Hardy.

THAT afternoon he got one tip—reasonably enough, from a news-store which sold tips on races.

"A big seagoin' guy wit' jack," said the proprietor in the best of Brooklyn accents. "He might be the one some fellas here steered down to Carnahan's. Does he like to hit the wheel?"

"Roulette? I've seen him try it. Where's Carnahan's?"

"Between here an' Miami. Any cop will tell ya."

Carnahan's was dull. Impeccably respectable ladies with black bags, oldish men with patient eyes and a touch of the farmer about their hands, were playing roulette, faro, twenty-one and bingo for small stakes; there was only a sprinkling of more sophisticated gamblers.

Only the doorman lent romance to the place. He was a fat ex-pug. He had a thick ear, plainly of recent origin. That ear reminded Peter Orde of the cauliflower ear of an A.B. on the *Castleton* who, while high, had connected with one of Herb Doran's swings.

In the roulette-room Peter Orde's observant eyes saw cleverly concealed signs of damage to the roulette-table and to one wall—such signs as might have been made by a swinging chair. He asked about it of a tourist patiently jotting down in a book the numbers that the ball trickled into.

"Raid? We don't have raids in Florida." The tourist was as insulted as if Peter had said *snow*. "I heard about a month ago a big sorehead swore that the wheel was wired and pulled it out by the roots—an' it *was* wired; and he tried to clean up the place."

"What happened after that?"

"They threw him out, an' he went away."

Peter shook his head. Not coming back wasn't Herb's style. He worked hard on that clue but got nowhere. The proprietor, Carnahan, a bored gentleman with a face like the chart of a volcanic Leeward Isle, had an old bruise, now yellow, on one cheekbone. He didn't look

as if he would talk. Disappointed, Peter returned to Lauderdale.

"It's Hardy's place—or nothing," he decided.

Morosely he retrieved his bag from the bus station and went back to the tourist home. Next day, after some thought, he rented a car for a week, an aged car with a motor that did not put its back into its work. He drove past Hardy's a few times.

The place was doing quite a brisk business. He caught no glimpse of Kathleen as he crawled past. But when he hooked his bumper under the fender of a customer's car she appeared like magic. While she watched he appeased the angry Ohio tourist with two dollars.

"You aren't sabotaging me, are you, Killie?" she asked.

"I'd like to spank you," he said savagely. "Look here, can't we come to some compromise on this?"

Her eyes sparkled with intelligence.

"You mean—I tell you all about Herb Doran?"

"That's it."

"No!"

He got into his car. It bucked when he tried to drive away with dignity. He went back to the tourist house, dug out his binoculars and from his window started watch on the Hardy store. Herb Doran might drive up. *Might*.

"She's in love with him," he told himself. "And she's deadly afraid that I'll jerk him loose. That's it. Sure!"

It was a perfect theory. The trouble was that he didn't believe it. This girl wasn't afraid of anybody. It was surprising how many young pups drove up to imbibe lingeringly of orange juice without getting a glimpse of Kathleen.

BY six o'clock Peter Orde had a headache from eyestrain. By eight o'clock he was hungry. Suddenly he bent forward. Kathleen had appeared. She was becomingly attired in the sort of thing he had happened to notice advertised in a Sunday paper as suitable for tropical evening wear. At the time he had devoted more attention to the pictured girls in bathing-suits and play-suits, but Kathleen's rig was certainly something like the pictured things. She was stepping out.

"She's going to meet that great big irresponsible boy," Peter muttered. He dropped his glasses. He hustled out and had his car running before Kathleen had finished talking to a salesman. When she

swept past in her gay little roadster he slid out into the street behind her. In the stream of cars blasting northward along the Federal they hummed on to Lauderdale. There Kathleen left the main road to turn toward the beach.

When she pulled into the parking section of a big dine-and-dance place, Peter Orde grinned knowingly. He parked on the street and walked in just in time to see her disappear into the powder-room. He ignored a fluttering head-waiter, to stroll around the dining-room and the patio. Herb Doran's big form didn't show. Peter sat down at an inconspicuous table to watch the powder-room door.

In a moment Kathleen came out. It occurred to him that she looked beautiful. She walked across the room to his table. The head-waiter pulled out a chair. She sat down opposite him with dark blue eyes glowing instead of snapping.

"It has been years since I inveigled a young man into taking me to such an expensive place," she said. "I hope you're a good dancer, Sir Alcohol."

The pause was more than momentary. "I can stand it if you can," he said at last.

"I knew you could," she said. "In spite of your sober devotion to duty and to binoculars, at heart you're nothing but a great big irresponsible b—"

"Don't call me that, even if you smile," he warned her.

IT was a gay evening. His conscientious efforts to ply her with drink and get from her the secret of Herb Doran's fate failed, but failed pleasantly, without sting. He was most abstemious himself. In spite of the amusing battle of wits and the fun of dancing, the girl was thinking of something beyond the walls of the patio. And she was determined to leave at midnight. Unlike *Cinderella*, she lost no slippers because she dallied overlong. She went.

"How about a clue, then, if you won't tell me where he is?" he asked as he saw her into her car.

"Can't you ever forget business?"

"That's why I want a clue," he said. "You're a most diverting lady."

Kathleen shuddered. "A lady," she said. "A poisonous, languorous breed, like the green morays down among the keys."

With her foot on the throttle she beat his voice. His tired car failed to keep pace with the homeward swoop of her roadster.

He hadn't even started to undress when the pounding on the front door of the tourist home began. Indignantly certain that some drunk was trying to break in, Peter Orde took over for his elderly proprietors and went down to stop it.

Kathleen was there—a frightened, breathless Kathleen. Seriousness had popped through the cellophane frivolity.

"You wanted to find Herb Doran," she said. "So do I, now, and right away. Come on, if you're game."

NOT until he was in her car and the car was leaping southward down the Federal did she speak again.

"Herb Doran's been in jail," she said. "He got thirty days. I didn't want you to know. Today he got out and this evening he was to come to Hardy's to see me. That was why you had the pleasure of taking me out tonight—I didn't want you to spot him. But—"

The car bored ahead faster.

"Where are we going?"

"Carnahan's! You know it?"

He nodded. "Go on."

"Herb did have two thousand when he came ashore, and he was going to make it grow to ten thousand in no time. Though he certainly took a lot of shooting off, he was nice. He's—"

"—just a great big irresponsible boy," said Peter. "Go on!"

"I tried to knock some sense into his head—my maternal instinct—no, some repressed emotion, no doubt. But he would go and play doubles or quits at roulette. He couldn't lose, he said. But he did, and he suspected the wheel was crooked—and wrecked the place.

"They threw him out. He waited and followed Carnahan and his doorman-guard to their apartment. He collared them in front of the house to make them disgorge. The police interrupted the fight and Herb got thirty days for slugging them and an apartment-house man who mixed in."

"He did come back for more, then," Peter said. "That's why I muffed a clue."

"I'm coming to the bad part," said Kathleen. "Before they took him off to the stockade he sent for me and asked me to go to his hotel and collect his things to keep for him. I did. There was a pistol—"

Peter nodded. "He had one."

"I hid it—but tonight Herb forced that helpless mug at the store to tell him where. Herb's got that gun—and he headed for Carnahan's half an hour ago."



Peter let go with a jab, a working mate's blow; the doorman stood weaving.

Peter Orde grunted as if somebody had poked him hard in the wind. "When Herb Doran gets the idea he's being picked on, he's bad," he said.

"I don't like that man with the incredible face—I think it's Carnahan himself," she said.

THE parking-space outside Carnahan's place was full of cars. They picked a spot highly convenient for a quick getaway and then stood for a tense moment looking at the lighted bulk of the two-story building. A subdued murmur of voices came to them through the open windows but no reverberations of a gun or shrieks of panic. Carnahan's was normal.

"Stay in the car, Kathleen," Peter said. "I'll take a look around inside."

He hurried away from her. The door was open; the thick-eared doorman was too busy reassuring a couple of nervous tourists even to look at Peter Orde.

Peter combed the public rooms without sighting Herb Doran. He should have loomed high above that mob of amateur gamblers. Quantity rather than quality was the house's style in suckers and it was jammed; Carnahan of the relief-map face was not in sight.

On his previous visit Peter Orde had located Carnahan's office in the layout. He moved toward the door, strategically located in the rear wall of the roulette-room. He waited until the croupier and lookout were both busy. As he opened the door his last backward glance showed him Kathleen in the entrance to the roulette-room. It was too late to chase her out, even if he could. He slid into Carnahan's office.

A gun was poked instantly into his stomach. Before he did anything about it, he saw the man gripping it was Herb Doran.

"Well, for— Has this thug got into you, too, Pete?" said Herb Doran. He pointed—with the gun—at Carnahan, who was sitting bolt upright behind his desk. The proprietor's face was more rugged than usual. His eyes, after a brief switch to Peter, flicked back to the towering, muscled body of Herb Doran.

"No," said Peter. "You're the only one who's got into me."

"He took me for our two thousand—with a wired wheel," said Herb, grinning sourly. "And now the pup claims he's got only a thousand to square it."

Peter Orde snapped both hands to the automatic in Herb's right hand. One hand gripped Herb's wrist; the other the gun. Peter wrenched. The gun came loose, like a well-extracted tooth.

"Easy, Herb!" he said.

"I don't leave without my money—not without piling up the joint!" Herb Doran roared. "Damn you, Pete—"

"Are you willing to settle for a thousand—with the gun out of sight?" Peter Orde said to Carnahan.

The gambler nodded sullenly. "It's worth that to get this welshing dock-walloper out o' here without wrecking the place an' scaring my clients," he said. "One thousand—right?"

"You're taking it, Herb, my lad, and fast, while the taking's good," Peter said through his teeth. "We'll charge off the other thousand to your being just a great big irresponsible boy, not to a wired wheel. Pay off, Carnahan!"

CARNAHAN pulled out a huge roll of fives, tens, and twenties, dirty money, all of it. He started counting. His face was bad.

The door opened behind Peter before he was quite through. It was Kathleen.

"That doorman got a signal just now," the girl reported quickly. "I heard a buzzer—and he rushed outside. I lost him in the parking-place."

"I'll take the wad for a thousand, you swab!" said Herb Doran. He grabbed the money on the desk and the thin roll left in Carnahan's hand. "Let's shove off!"

"Right—but don't count on having that thousand long after we get outside," said Peter grimly. "Carnahan will have had his foot on a button. Kathleen, you stay in the public rooms, right in the middle of the crowd. You'll be safe there."

He put his lips close to her ear. "Walk out with the first group that leaves after we go. Drive to the Federal and wait a block north. We'll be along."

"You give lots of orders, don't you?" said Kathleen.

Peter grabbed Herb Doran's arm and shook him loose from the threatening scowl he had trained on the unhappy Carnahan.

"Handsomely, now, sailor," he said. "Nothing rough!"

He opened the door. They walked out into the roulette-room. He had piloted Herb almost through when Herb, with a sudden growl, bent low, put a massive shoulder under the table and heaved.

With a splintering of angle-irons and fittings, the roulette-table rose in the air. A wave of startled people rushed backward. The table hesitated and then toppled over on its side. Herb Doran pointed to a wire running through one table leg, straight-armed the croupier and responded to Peter's poke by moving on toward the door.

"Fast!" said Peter.

They made the door unchallenged. But outside it was different. The big doorman was waiting on the steps. He backed out into the dark parking-lot.

"I'm right with you," said Kathleen, behind them.

Peter groaned. He grabbed the girl's arm and pushed her toward the car.

A man came hurtling around the corner of the building. By the light from a window Peter saw he was Carnahan. He had a gleaming revolver in his hand. This wasn't funny any more.

Carnahan ran for Herb Doran. Peter pulled the automatic he had taken away from Herb. With a surprising reach—surprising to Carnahan—he hit out at Carnahan's gleaming weapon. The gambler's gun dropped.

The doorman had no gun. Herb Doran was sparring with him, setting him up for one of his devastating shots to the side of the head. Another man was working around behind Herb.

Peter Orde stepped toward the doorman. He let go with a jab, a short, undramatic punch, a mere working mate's blow, guaranteed to put a drunk to sleep. Though a good shifty pug, the doorman was accustomed to fighting one man at a time. Peter's jab to the jaw paralyzed him. He stood weaving on his feet.

The man behind Herb faded. Carnahan shouted angrily, boring in himself. Herb Doran, cheated of the doorman, knocked him down.

"I wanted to thicken that guy's other ear!" Herb complained to Peter.

"Here's Carnahan's gun," said Kathleen, pushing a gun into Peter's hand. "You're probably a better shot than I am."

Peter was shocked. "Get going!" he panted. "Why can't you behave?"

"Like a lady?" asked Kathleen. But this time she yielded to the propelling force of his arm. She slid into the driver's seat again.

Beside the car Herb Doran halted. Plainly his pride had been offended by the way in which Peter had taken over the doorman.

"I'm going back for that other thousand," he said. He thrust the wad of money into the car. "This one is yours. Carnahan tried to gyp me. You two wait here."

Peter's right hand was aching. But as Herb Doran started back toward Carnahan's Peter hit out again. He tagged Herb neatly under the chin, coming up. Peter caught him before he fell.

Without comment Kathleen opened the rumble seat. Peter, with a grunt of effort, heaved Herb Doran into the seat.

"You'd better get in with your great big irresponsible boy," Peter said.

"I'm driving," Kathleen answered.

They got going, fast. Herb was roaring and banging on the rear window before they had gone a block. Kathleen paid no heed.

"We're heading across Florida for Tampa," Peter Orde said curtly. "The *Castleton* will be there. I'll smuggle Herb aboard. He's got a jail record now. Carnahan can easily have him pinched for robbery—and make it stick. Drive us to Lauderdale. I'll switch him to my car."

She turned south at the Federal instead of north. "Tampa's a good bit less than three hundred by the Tamiami Trail. You can spell me."

"You never do take any orders, do you?" said Peter Orde.

"I do, Killer, but not when the orders are to make me act like a lady," the girl said. Her lips twisted bitterly. "I was a lady once—watching Dad get worse winter by winter up North. I was a librarian, Peter, a very, very ladylike job. I think I stayed a lady about one winter too long—for Dad. I'm never going to be a lady again."

KATHLEEN skirted Miami and hit the trail across Florida without a stop. Herb Doran banged on the rear window at intervals. The headlights split the Everglades and the throbbing car on the empty road went through the gap like a hurtling wedge.

When Kathleen stopped for Peter to take the wheel, Herb Doran bounced angrily out of the rumble seat. "What is this—a kidnaping?"

"A shanghaiing," Peter said. "It's better than a long-term jailing. The *Castleton's* at Tampa."

Herb looked at Kathleen uneasily.

"I'm not languishing," said Kathleen. "Tough, aren't you?" Peter muttered. "Yes, Killie," she said meekly.

They went on, with Peter driving. Long before dawn they reached the Gulf coast. Driving trick-and-trick they shot north, slowing at last in the traffic around Tampa. It was after eight.

"How high does Herb stand with you?" Peter asked suddenly.

"Ceiling zero," said Kathleen.

"Does that go for all sailors?"

"No. Some are worse."

Peter nodded....

The *Castleton* was alongside the refrigerating-plant. Peter led them to the gangplank. Captain Slater was ripping around on the well deck. He looked as if he had shed a few pounds. He shook his fist at Peter Orde.

"A nice bunch of mutinous dock-scourings you made out of my crew!" he roared. "I've just kicked the second mate onto the string-piece because he couldn't handle 'em."

He breathed hard, ready to pounce at Peter Orde's first word. But Peter didn't speak.

"And now you try to stick me with that lubber!" the Old Man roared. He stabbed his finger at Herb Doran; then turned to stab at Peter Orde. "What d'you mean by jumping ship on a weak excuse like that little argument about stock? Take over here, Mister; make these swabs sweat!"

He stared at Kathleen Hardy, started to stab at her with his finger and changed his mind. "Who's this?" he asked, nodding.

"Can you use a stewardess, Captain?" Kathleen asked.

"Uh—" Herb Doran began.

She looked full at Peter Orde. "In the mate's watch," she added.

Peter Orde jumped into speech before Captain Slater had turned blue.

"I'm staying ashore," Peter Orde said quickly.

"Be reasonable!" the Old Man said. He was noisy about it. "Finish this trip and I'll see you command her next voyage. I'm old and all my money's in the Line, Peter. I've got to get a master for this one, Peter, before I retire. What d'you say, boy?"

"You'd better take it, Killer," Kathleen said. "I can't see you juggling orange crates at Hardy's."

"Don't keep calling me Killer," Peter said. "I'm not that kind at all. Could you stand a part-time husband?"

"You are, too," said Kathleen. "You've slain me, haven't you? You wouldn't be a part-time husband, Peter—not to me."

The Lucky Fiddler

By MICHAEL GALLISTER



HALDON was the man's name. Moore saw him first the afternoon when the Temple and the insurance buildings near by caught it—when everyone ducked into the nearest underground, and the shelters were jammed for hours, and the trains were blocked for a long while.

It was a strange medley of humans that evening: beefy City merchants, barristers from the Law Courts, clerks and artists, and the overwhelming mass of those who had no other refuge—the poor. Costers and barrowmen jiggled elbows with lords and ladies that even-

ing. Every inch of space was crammed to the very rails.

For Moore it was notable because it was his birthday. A spare, hurt man of forty with gravely carven features, he had just left the office and started to walk home, with his stick and his limp—for his right foot had been crushed and broken in the first war, when he was no more than a boy—when the alarm sounded. It did not matter to him particularly; he had no one at home to welcome him. Two weeks before, his wife had



*A memorable drama
of war-time London.*



gone; a last disagreement, with strained nerves breaking, and she walked out. He had heard nothing from her since. He was bitter enough, but the bitterness passed. He knew now that he wanted her, that it was all a miserable mistake of shattered nerves—but it was too late.

The confusion was horrible enough at the start, until someone got the singing going, and the roaring wave of voices went echoing down the tunnels. Moore was occupied in keeping back two tiny creeping children who insisted on going



He felt that he was no use to anyone.

too near the platform's edge, when he saw the man coming, heard him greeted by eager voices of recognition on all sides, watched him take a violin out of its worn case and start playing a tune.

"Bli'me if he aint a good 'un!" said a man next to Moore. "Seen him last week at Charing Cross, I did. . . . Touched in the head, someone says."

Moore, who himself had a violin at home, little used these latter years, was astonished by the fiddler; the man could really play. He had a distinguished look; he was dark and lean, with grizzled locks falling about his ears, and a finely chiseled profile. As he played, his eyes wandered about. Moore got the idea that he was searching, not aimlessly.

Touched in the head? Well, one could never tell, these days. The Blitz put some people under.

The two brats made a simultaneous dive for the rails. Moore checked them, and was furious at the neglect until he located the mother, who had three others clumped about her. Another woman came to the rescue and the two were put in safety. The fiddler, ceasing his playing, nodded and smiled to Moore, as though to an old acquaintance; but he was not.

"It's a wonderful thing," he said, then chinned his fiddle again and struck into a gay Vieuxtemps fragment, smiling the

while. But his eyes never ceased to wander.

Presently trains were coming through again. Moore boarded one and went on to Knightsbridge and his empty flat.

DURING the days that followed he thought more than once of the violinist whose face was one to haunt the memory, somehow. He got out his own violin, tried to play, put it sadly away again. He thought of the man's words: "It's a wonderful thing!" What was?

Then, one afternoon, as Moore limped up to the Strand in search of a taxi—he was not much good at walking any more—he came face to face with the man in front of the Savoy. The fiddler looked neat and well dressed, and had the violin case under his arm. He met the gaze of Moore and nodded with recognition.

"Oh, hello!" said Moore. "Saw you in the tube the other evening, didn't I?"

"And you with the children," was the reply. "Yes. Having a quiet day today, eh?"

"Come inside and have a drink," Moore said on quick impulse.

The other accepted. "I haven't been in here for a long time," he said, as they entered. "I used to play here, a long while ago."

Over a drink, they exchanged names. Ralph Haldon wore well at close view. Touched in the head? Moore dismissed the possibility with scorn.

"That instrument of yours has a tone," he said. "I played a bit myself, once."

"Yes; I thought so," said Haldon. "You're the type. It's an Amati. I used to play until things broke up for me, a month ago."

Moore was amazed. Conservatoire, the Promenade Concerts—why, the man was one of the best!

As they pursued acquaintance, Haldon proved himself a man of charm and far more. He was given to odd speeches, odd words, unfinished thoughts.

Moore inquired:

"What did you mean, that night in the tube, when you said it was a wonderful thing? What was wonderful?"

Haldon smiled. "You know of yourself, Moore; no need for me to tell you. You have understanding; you have suffered. You limp, and one who limps usually is given compensation in strange ways."

"Limp? Yes. I was with the artillery—got this foot two days before the Armistice. That was a long time ago."

"Not as long as Dunkerque," said Haldon, as his eyes roved about. "Dunkerque was where our boy John stayed. He would have been at the Conservatory, except for the war. His poor mother was not quite the same afterward. There was no doubt about him, no doubt whatever; he came and spoke to us that night, so we were quite sure."

"You mean—after he was dead?"

"Naturally. That is, after his body was dead, to be more exact. We have a very careless habit of speech about such matters, eh? Yes, poor Elsa was not the same. She took it terribly to heart, and I could not help her, though we have lived a long time together."

Hallucinations? Moore sat in silence, a troubous wind of thought whirling across his brain. A child, to him and to Caroline, might have made all the difference. There had been a child, at the beginning, but the child had died.

Haldon's eyes probed at him.

"I did not mean to stir old griefs in you," he said gently.

Moore started slightly. Old griefs? Yes, of course; but one or two very strange things had happened, after the child died; quite incredible things, in a prosaic world. Hallucinations, he had called them. He smiled at Haldon.

"You're a strange fellow, if you don't mind my saying so! Do you live near by?"

"Oh, anywhere!" Haldon waved a hand vaguely, a slim, well-kept, long-fingered hand. "It is of no importance. We lost everything when the bomb came, that night; and what was worse, I lost Elsa. That was before matters were as well organized as they are now, you know. She just disappeared. I've been looking for her ever since."

The tragedy of the words hit Moore. "You mean, she was—hurt? Killed?"

HALDON shook his head. "No—if she were dead, I'd know. She's just wandering somewhere, and I must find her. You see, she'd tell me about it if she were dead, but I've heard nothing at all from her. Of course, I've searched through the regular channels and all that sort of thing; it's quite useless. So I'm looking for her myself. It's the best way, really, though it's rather wearing at times."

As he spoke, Haldon sat quite easily, quite relaxed, his eyes wandering about as always. He accepted a cigarette and lighted it at the match Moore held.

Hallucinations, yes. No doubt of that. Plenty of people had been faced with the same sort of tragedy these days; the well-ordered world was gone, and uncertainty was the worst of all things. Moore thought of his own case; how little it seemed, how pathetically trifling beside this man's sorrow! Caroline, at least, was safe enough somewhere, probably with her people in Sussex, though she had replied to none of his letters.

"Well, here's to a quiet night!" Haldon lifted his glass, smiling again. "A quiet night, and pea-soup fog—and thumbs up!"

They drank, walked out of the hotel, and separated with a handclasp.

MOORE'S thoughts went back to the man again and again, in the days that followed: Haldon and his Amati, delving everywhere into the deeps, searching aimlessly night after night, day after day—well, it dwarfed his own troubles and helped him to keep his chin up. What a cursed fool he had been to snap at Caroline that last day! Just nerves, of course; people all over the country were being hit hard the same way. The bombing, the hellish nights, sapped one's vitality and left one weary and worn out.

Meantime the Lucky Fiddler, as he was generally known, became something of a legendary figure; Moore heard of him from various directions. Every air-raid night—which was close to every night—he showed up among the cave dwellers, usually sticking to the East End, though he occasionally went farther afield. Like the general public, he avoided the brick shelters and frequented the underground stations; he was always alone amid the throngs, he refused any proffered coins, he played any and all sorts of music, and it was said that wherever he showed up, luck came that way. Accidents diminished, everything went well; it was rumored that good luck attended him.

"Natural enough," thought Moore. "People fasten their attention on him and forget their worries; they listen to his music and their nerves relax the tension. He's in a different class from the usual entertainers, and they appreciate it. Damn it! If he does bring luck, I'd not mind if he showed up again where I'm concerned!"

Things were not going so well with Moore; the clouds were closing in upon him. Business was, of course, demoral-

ized, and this was bad for him. He was one of those men who can fight through hell and high water so long as the soul-nucleus of home exists intact, but who go to pieces when flung adrift. He was now drifting fast, toward one end.

He had never loved anyone but Caroline; he did not seek elsewhere; he wanted no one else. Since her going, the weight of his handicap had become crushing. A crippled man has no chance, he told himself, these days. And always, night after night, the flare of fires, the drone of bombers, the screaming sirens of bombs, the tremendously increasing anti-aircraft barrage—all had helped wear him down. He was not himself; his anchors were dragging. Small wonder that he got out his old service Browning and loaded it, and left it on the mantel at home. He felt that he was no use to himself or anyone else, alive.

He was at this brink of the abyss when he next encountered the violinist.

THESE night raids seldom started before eight. He stopped in for a bite downtown and took the tube home. But tonight Knightsbridge was catching it full force. Moore was leaving the underground as the alarm sounded—a wailing horror sweeping the skies, tautening the nerves, and sending the brain into a shrinking spasm. Close upon it rose the barrage, a drumming, bursting, deafening roar of sound, and then a bomb fell somewhere close and shattered the world.

Moore stood hesitant; it was only three blocks to his apartment building, but he knew better than to chance it. He turned and joined the stream of people flooding down into the refuge of the tunnel below. Many of them were prepared for the night; there had been a good crowd here ahead of time, and space was going to be at a premium. The near-by Hyde Park and its shelters had not absorbed the populace by a good deal, he reflected.

People were sprawled everywhere; some had been here for hours. Moore, warmed by his dinner-drinks, picked his way to an empty spot, removed his top-coat, and made himself as comfortable as possible. He sat drowsily, while the babble of tongues reverberated along the air; the roar outside had dwindled to a mere background, people were singing, talking, working hard to keep up spirit. An accordion was pumping away somewhere down the platform, and gusts of laughter rose from a group near by.

Here and there appeared staring misery, but in general, in the mass, a cheerful resignation and an impersonal effort to be helpful were evident on all sides. It was infectious. Moore found himself stirring to make a place for a couple of old people, late arrivals; there were the ever-present children to look after, and presently he had a group of them around him and was launching into stories that held them breathless—the old, old stories of goblins and sprites and of the fairyland that now more than ever was a place of enchanted unreality.

A wave of voices, of delighted greetings and hails, lifted his gaze, and he saw Haldon far down the platform and thinly heard the violin. He went on with his stories, and half an hour later Haldon had worked his way along to Moore's vicinity. The fiddle, however, was decidedly not the same; it was harsh and rasping; the old smooth, silky tone was gone.

Moore rose, and the player saw him and nodded, smilingly. When he had finished, he came to Moore and shook hands, beaming.

"Is that another violin you have?" Moore asked.

"Yes." Haldon's face changed; the man looked old and broken, all in a moment. "The Amati—there was an accident. It was smashed. This was all I could get to replace it; two and ten, and not worth that."

The blow must have driven deep; Moore could appreciate what it meant. He caught Haldon by the arm.

"Look here! Come along home with me when we get a chance. I've a violin there, and you're welcome to it. Not an Amati by a long shot, but it's a Betts, and a good one. Only two or three blocks from here. What say?"

INCREDULOUSLY Haldon stared at him. Just then a train came rumbling and crashing along, and the man's words were lost; but there was no need of words. The look in Haldon's face was enough. When the train was gone again, Moore heard his voice:

"All the difference in the world! I can't tell you what it means—you'll have a blessing for this."

"No use for blessings," said Moore, and laughed harshly. "You can finish the night at my place too; there's a good basement shelter."

Haldon shook his head. "Thank you, I'd best keep at work. Of late, an idea

has come to me that Elsa might be somewhere about here. . . . The Albert Hall, you know—she used to be there always, even when I wasn't playing. She admired the place and liked it, oddly enough."

A group of late arrivals, desperately hoping to find a place, came in; it was close to nine, when all music and singing would cease and the cave-dwellers would seek slumber. The newcomers reported a bit of a lull outside.

"Then let's go," said Moore.

HALDON nodded and put the fiddle in its case—a new, cheap case, Moore noticed. As they made for the stairs, he told how the accident had happened, two nights ago. Another blackout accident: a car had crushed the Amati; he himself had been lucky to escape with his life.

They came up to the street. Moore exchanged a word with the policeman at the stair-head; then he and Haldon started away. In the direction of the City a lurid glare was rising in the sky; somewhere close by the bells of fire-engines were changing furiously; the golden burst of shells was continuous in the sky, the noise of the barrage was terrific, but the heavy bomb explosions was nowhere near. Haldon took Moore by the arm.

"Isn't it wonderful?" he shouted.

"What, this?" Moore waved his stick at the sky. "Is this what you mean?"

"No, no. Down there in the shelter."

A rattling hail of shrapnel on the roofs, like rifle-fire, sent them ducking for shelter of the buildings. They hurried on. Moore limped along as fast as he could; the noise was tearing at him frightfully; he wanted to be out of it.

The three blocks seemed an eternity. They reached the apartment building at last. Here everything was orderly, air-raid wardens and nurses at each stair-landing—the elevator was out of commission; and the acute relief from strain was unspeakably grateful.

He let Haldon into the apartment, struck a match and lighted a candle. There was a letter under the door. He picked it up and his heart leaped at sight of Caroline's writing, to be followed by a dart of fear at what the missive might contain. The fear was justified.

With a word of apology he tore open the envelope and drew out the single sheet, holding it close to the candle-



"We lost everything when the bomb came."

flame. The words seemed to go into him like barbs:

Your letter of the 3rd was forwarded from Sussex. You need not address me further; I'm supporting myself and have no need or desire of anything from you.

Just one curt, short, angry paragraph—but for Moore everything was contained in the first five words. The 3rd—that was just after she had left. Yes, he had written her that day in bitter fury. She would have got that letter, and none of the others. . . . Things always went that way. None of the others, in which he had poured out his heart to her—only the one bitterly reproachful letter. He would have given anything, now, not to have written it.

He lifted his head. Haldon glimpsed his face and spoke gently.

"I'm very sorry; bad news, eh?"

"The result of my own folly," said Moore, returning to normal with an effort. "What was it you were saying, there on the street—what's so wonderful? Come on, tell me."

"Why, those people!" Haldon gestured with his long hand. "You, the rest of them, all of them, living in these caves of the modern world, sleeping, existing! Not one of them is able to do anything of himself; but consider them *en masse*—calm, steady, singing, enduring! Do you know what a tremendous force is generated by mass psychology? You do, of course. Panic, for example—or this. That's what is so wonderful, Moore. A



Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

force, a strength, greater than all destruction! Surprising things will come out of it; you'll see! The intangible, the non-material things are the greatest in the universe . . . such a force as this reaches out to all of us."

Moore scarcely listened. He was burning with regret; that curt letter had set him afire. Why could not Caroline have received one of his other letters? Why had he written that damned thing at all! Nerves, of course; but he scorned to take shelter behind this. Yes, she would be supporting herself. She had run a swanky West End music-shop before their marriage; she was independent. . . .

"Let me show you Elsa's picture," Haldon was saying. From his pocket he took a flat leather case, and opened it. Here were two pictures: the same woman, one young, one old. Haldon pointed to the letter.

"That was taken for our boy, John, before he enlisted. It's a good picture of her."

Moore caught at the case and held it to the light. A sudden excitement seized him.

"Dunkerque—that was where our boy John stayed. . . . He came and spoke to us that night."



Got off at the Brompton Road stop and walked back. There was a greengrocer's shop. I stopped in to get some tinned things. She was sitting in a chair, in the room back of the shop; she looked just like this, white ruffle and all."

"Tell me, tell me!" begged Haldon. "The name of the shop!"

"Lord, man, I don't know!" Moore looked at him blankly. "But I can take you straight there. It'll be shut up now, of course. . . . See here, you stop for the night and we'll go in the morning."

"Do you think I'll wait, that I can wait, till morning? No, no!"

"Very well, have it your own way," said Moore. "Anyhow, this demands a drink. Half a minute, now. . . . Oh, the violin! There it is, in the case standing in the corner. Take it, case and all. Throw away this horrible thing you have here."

"No," said Haldon, smiling again. "No; good comes of everything, Moore. I'll leave it with you, and some day I'll bring back your Betts."

Moore went out into the dining-room, lit another candle, and poured out the drinks. He was exultant, uplifted; it was a wonderful thing that had just happened. It had put him into a glow. He

would never forget the face of Haldon, in those moments—a face transfigured, radiant with a glorious happiness. And it was his doing! That is, if one barred out the laws of coincidence. It gave Moore a feeling of exaltation.

Afterward, long afterward, he remembered with certainty that not now, nor previously, had he told Haldon of his own trouble, nor about Caroline.

He came back with the drinks to find Haldon sitting with his head in his hands, and tears glinting on his fingers.

"Hello! Looked at the fiddle yet?" he asked awkwardly.

Haldon looked up and smiled. "No. I was giving thanks—gratitude and blessings. It makes one feel humble, Moore. I was so certain all this while that she had merely wandered off, that she was alive, that she would have spoken to me if she were dead. . . . Well, I owe you a great deal. One never knows the greatness of a woman until one loses her."

Moore winced at that.

"Me? You owe me nothing at all, Haldon. It makes me very happy, really. All chance, you know."

"I do not believe in chance." Haldon stood up, put Moore's violin-case on the table by the candle, and opened it. "No; there's no such thing as chance, no such thing! You should know that, yourself. Strange, how from our first meeting I felt there was some bond between us. . . . Ah, a Betts, sure enough!"

He took out the violin and cuddled it under his chin. Moore walked over to the mantel, and his eye fell on the Browning. A thin, bitter smile touched his lips. He reached out and touched the weapon. Well, no need to hesitate now! His affairs were in shape, and this letter from Caroline had finished everything.

HALDON played, and seldom had Moore heard such playing; the wood sang gloriously, the strings rushed with happiness and fervor and triumph. Then, at a concussion that shook the air and the building, Haldon put down the bow.

"I think you were right," he said. "Something tells me to stay here, if I may; one must not tempt fate. I cannot wait; yet I must wait. It would be madness, after all."

"Yes," agreed Moore. "See here, I'll draw you a diagram. . . . I can show you exactly where that shop is located. Then you can go in the morning, yourself; catch a train down to Brompton

Road and walk back, straight to it. I remember perfectly."

He sat down then and there with pencil and paper, and in five minutes had sketched the thing. Haldon took the paper, studied it, asked a question or two, folded and pocketed it, and then gave Moore a look.

"About the violin: Now that I've found her—"

"Keep it. Really, it'll give me great pleasure," Moore said earnestly. "I'm so frightfully rusty that it hurts me to try the Betts; I'd like to know that you're using it. And Elsa will be glad, too."

"I was thinking of that," said Haldon soberly. "Yes, she will be glad."

He played again. Later they got to sleep, despite rocketing bursts of archie fire, and the distant bomb-explosions.

WITH morning, Moore got breakfast for them both. Haldon was impatient now, wildly impatient to get away; Moore had no reason to detain him, for it was the opening hour, and the greengrocer's place would be unshuttered. Beaming, radiant, excited, Haldon got off, the Betts in its case under his arm. Moore shook hands with him at the door, saw him start down the stairs, and came back into the empty apartment.

Caroline's letter still lay on the table. At sight of it, his heart contracted.

The devil! Why go to the office at all? Shave, write a last note, and get the whole thing over; should have done it last night, of course, but Haldon was here. No such thing as chance, eh?

With his harsh, bitter laugh, Moore went into the bedroom and set about his shaving and dressing.

When he had dressed, he sat down and wrote a short holograph will and enclosed it in a brief note to his solicitors. He was at tension—a taut, hard relief that the moment had come. Go down and post the letter, then come back here. . . .

The doorbell buzzed angrily. He went to the door and opened it. A policeman stood there, and a woman in the blue uniform of the Auxiliary Ambulance Service, holding something.

"Mr. Moore? Do you recognize this? Your name was inside the case."

He stared at the violin-case—his own, and the Betts was in it.

"What's all this?" he demanded. "A friend of mine left here with it only a few minutes ago, a Mr. Haldon—"

"Very sorry, sir. The gentleman carrying it was most incautious. . . . There's a bit of a fire down Brompton Road way, a place that got hit last night, and he would have to pass along the wall as it was falling." The policeman seemed aggrieved. Perhaps he was.

Moore stared blankly. "You don't mean—you can't mean—he wasn't—"

They told him the truth, and left.

Moore was struck to the heart. He dropped into a chair and looked at nothing; the tragedy of it was supreme. Poor Haldon—killed in the very moment of success! Struck down amid his blind happy excitement.

"Well, it might have been worse," muttered Moore, recovering. "No such thing as chance, eh? Poor chap! At least he went out at the right time, if one looks at it that way. . . . H'm! His wife waiting in that shop! Looks like a job I'll have to see to at once. She's probably unable to tell anything about herself, and that greengrocer chap took her in—yes, I'll have to see it. That's the least I can do for the poor woman—and for him as well. Hm! I'd better find out their address."

Haldon had been bombed out, he remembered; still, there were the formalities. He took the cheap wooden violin-case that Haldon had left here, placed it on the table, and opened it. There would be a name and address inside, no doubt.

THERE was nothing, beyond the horrible yellow fiddle; nothing save a twist of paper under the neck. It was a bill-of-sale from a music-shop in Bayswater. Two pound ten—yes, that was what Haldon said he had paid. . . .

"Good God!" exclaimed Moore thickly, staring down at the paper, at the writing on it. He reached for the letter from Caroline—yes, yes! It was fact; it was reality! Then he was jumping across the room, reaching for the telephone. The receipt for the fiddle carried the number of the Bayswater shop. . . .

"Hello!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Hello! Is Mrs. Caroline Moore there? . . . Yes, if you please. . . . Hello! Caroline, is this you? For God's sake, Caroline—"

"Jimmy, darling!" came her voice. "How on earth did you find me? I was just on the point of coming over. . . . I've just had your two last letters. They came together. And dear, I'm so terribly sorry about that note I wrote you—"

No such thing as chance, said Haldon.

This fourteenth story in "The World Was Their Stage" deals with Puritan prejudice and the first produced play written by Americans.

An American Comedy

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

MRS. HENRY's "afternoon" at the yellow brick house in Fulton Street was an event in the theatrical world—a small world, more shunned than courted in the year 1787. John Henry, whose lameness demanded a crutch close at hand, was a partner with Hallam in the management of the American Company, so called because most of the players were English.

Royall Tyler, in fine blue broadcloth with golden seals dangling from his flowered silk waistcoat, was an erect and soldierly figure, as he should be, having soldiered for the past ten years. He knew

most of the players, and as he glanced about the drawing-room he caught suddenly at the arm of Tom Wignell, his particular crony, who played such juvenile leads as were no longer suited to the famous Hallam, now in his fifties.

"Tom! Look—that woman by the fireplace! Who is she?"

Wignell, who had lately got his wardrobe out of pawn by Tyler's help and was not only gayly attired but in rollicking spirits, turned, looked and grimaced.

"God preserve us! A school-teacher!" said he. "That's Mrs. Hallam's friend, Lillian somebody . . . I forget her name. No matter. Come along and I'll present





"Mistress Lillian,
allow me the
honor of present-
ing Fortunatus—
my friend Royall
Tyler, of Boston."

you. She teaches in the Female Academy opposite Trinity Churchyard—a noble situation to improve the young mind! Come on!"

Tyler was dragged over to the fireplace and presented grandiloquently.

"Mistress Lillian! Allow me the honor of presenting Fortunatus, a rugged specimen of our New England manhood—my friend Royall Tyler, of Boston, late major on the staff of General Benjamin Lincoln and instrumental in putting down Shay's rebellion up north—an authentic American from Harvard College, cut out for a lawyer but turned soldier. Excellent family, never been out of New England before and now never going back, his eyes having been dazzled by the foot-lights of the John Street Theater."

Mistress Lillian laughed heartily. She had gorgeous red hair, twinkling eyes in a pleasant young face, and a direct, energetic manner.

"Fortunatus! A nickname of good omen, Major Tyler," she said. "Mrs. Hallam has spoken of you, I think. And I must confess that I'm surprised to find you frequenting such company."

"Your surprise is only equaled by my astonishment," retorted Tyler cheerful-

ly, "to learn that so charming a woman teaches school, and can so far demean herself as to consort with the base personages of the stage!"

"Good land! I'd lose my position in a moment did the Academy know it!" she exclaimed, with a comical grimace. "But it's worth it. And I like people. I like these people."

"And the act of Congress is still in force," said Tyler, "by which anyone in the service of the country who attends a play shall be dismissed. However, I've resigned the service, so I'm safe."

"Whatever is Mr. Hallam so furious about?" asked the lady.

TYLER turned to follow her glance, knowing that there was only too much truth in what she said about losing her position. Falling into association with Wignell and others, he had himself become fascinated by the hitherto despised Thespians. A Bostonian of blue blood that held the theater in utter horror, he had now settled down in New York to enjoy himself, and he was doing it beyond measure.

Hallam, a ruddy, hearty man who for the past thirty-five years had been the central figure in the budding American stage, was talking with Wignell and was evidently in a passion.

John Henry, limping up to bow over Mistress Lillian's hand, shrugged at her query.

"It seems that Mrs. Hallam was walking in Nassau Street this morning, and a pack of urchins ran after her shouting foul names," he explained. "Lewis takes the matter ill, quite naturally. Any man who could make the theater respectable in the eyes of Americans could have fame and fortune for the taking! Tyler, there's a task befitting you."

"Not so; it's a woman's task," broke in Mistress Lillian, her eyes sparkling. "And a woman could do it. Didn't some actress marry a lord, years ago?"

"Aye," said Henry. "That was Peggy Cheer; she took Lord Rosedale to the altar. But lords are out of fashion these days, and rare to boot."

HE moved away. Tyler, who was fascinated by the red-haired teacher, remained. He liked her charm, her energy, her sparkle, her lack of all pretense. He saw that she, like himself, was vitally interested in the people around them, perhaps in the stage itself.

"And just how, Miss Lillian," he inquired, "would you go about making the stage respectable?"

Hallam caught the words, during a lull in the buzz of tongues, and came over to them.

"Aye, how can such a thing be done?" he demanded. "I've tried—and failed—for the past thirty years."

Mistress Lillian took up the gage instantly.

"By means of a play," said she. "You're an Englishman, Lewis; you produce English plays. Well, this is the year 1787, not 1750. Our people look on the theater as an English importation. Revolutionize their whole outlook, give them a play dealing with Americans, by an American playwright!"

"I would in a moment, but no such playwright or play exists," said Hallam. "Find me such a play, and I'll produce it gladly—good, bad or indifferent!"

Tyler looked at Miss Lillian, and deliberately winked. Then, resolutely, he carried her off to the little garden in the rear of the brick house, handed her into the rose-arbor, and seated himself opposite her.

"Madam, I have guessed your secret!" he exclaimed. "And here, in the privacy of these roses, it may safely be discussed. God help you if any other guessed it! Your shame would be recounted to children yet unborn, if you know what I mean—the disgrace would probably put the Female Academy out of business!"

She laughed lightly, but her shrewd eyes were appraising him, not unkindly. He was good to look upon, with his grave, strong features, and his dancing eyes.

"My secret?" she echoed.

"Precisely. I read it in your face, in your eye, as you spoke to Hallam. 'Thou art the woman!' And you have written, or are writing, a play."

Color stole up her cheeks.

"Well, I—I've tried," she confessed. "At least, I'd like to write one. I know what it should be, too, but somehow I can't make it sound right."

"I know precisely how you feel," said Tyler. "I have the same trouble—that is, with the female rôles. You see, I left college at eighteen, and for the past ten years I've been tramping around New England with the Continental Army, and I just don't know how women talk."

Her face lighted up. "Oh! You, too! But it's the other way around with me—I can't make my men talk as they really should, and I don't know the New England speech very well, and my character of Brother Jonathan is a New Englander!"

"Dear lady, Providence has directed us this day, my word on it!" exclaimed Tyler, perhaps with more feeling than he was aware, for she colored again. "Tom Wignell has been lending me a hand with the work; I knew nothing about the theater until I came to New York. But I can fill your play with round New England oaths that will send a shudder through the quills of the Female Academy—"

"I can put in my own oaths, thank you," she broke in. "It's the dialect that I don't know, the ordinary way of speech. Really, Major Tyler, it would be wonderful; but you must take all the blame for it—for the play, I mean. For it to be written by me would be impossible. It would indeed be a disgrace; I would be a woman shunned and ostracized—and, you see, I support myself; I need to keep my position at the academy."

"Be damned to the money! I have plenty for two or a dozen—"

Tyler did not utter the impulsive words that rose to his tongue. Leaning forward, he phrased his thought in less startling language.

"We must talk about this. Would it cause any scandal if I called at the Academy to take you for a drive?"

"Heavens, yes!" she exclaimed. "That is, unless you can assure them of your deep respectability. Miss Semple is from Boston or near there."

"Then account it done; my family has a good name, at least," said he, radiant. "I'll rescue you from the Semple dragon on Sunday, Miss Lillian— Oh! That's all I know of your name!" he added, in dismayed confusion. "In fact, it's all I want to know, but since you're a rather practical young woman, and I might have to ask for you at the door."

"The name is Gentry," she said, bubbling with amusement. "But remember, you must promise to be the author of the play!"

"The promise is given," said Tyler.

SUNDAY beheld his carriage and spanking pair of bays throwing the Academy into a flutter by carrying Miss Lillian away; and it beheld Royall Tyler definitely in love. He even admitted the fact that same night to Wignell.

In the little tavern in Nassau Street, around the corner from Theater Alley and the John Street playhouse, the two of them sat late with pipes and a bowl of punch. Wignell read the first scene that Tyler handed him, and roared with delight.

"Man, it's wondrous fine!" he exclaimed. "Those two girls argufying over the foibles of dress—why, it's perfection! You've hit 'em off to the very life! Where'd you learn so much all of a sudden?"

Tyler beamed. "I'm in love, Tom; you may as well know it first as last. I'm the happiest man in New York this night! Though, to be honest, I doubt if she'll have me. She's so radiant—"

"Yes, I know all that by heart," broke in Wignell. "But do I know her?"

"You do not," lied Tyler. "She's a young lady of the town. Not so young, either; a woman, not a chit of a girl. A woman who's wise and lovely, a very rose in bloom!"

"Watch yourself, Fortunatus!" said the cynical Wignell. "Where's the thorns, eh?"

Where indeed? Tyler asked himself this question during the days that fol-

lowed, and found no answer. There were stolen meetings with the Hallams, or at the yellow brick house in Fulton Street; good Mrs. Henry could keep a secret. There were furious scribblings, exchanges of thought and word and action, while the play grew marvelously under Tyler's hand; and, as he came to know Lillian Gentry better, as he came to realize that his ambition was by no means hopeless, he wondered uneasily whether the gods might not indeed become jealous.

He had everything; he had too much, and knew it well. Miss Semple's Female Academy smiled upon him, not guessing that he was a friend of actors. He had family, money, position, and to these the greatest gift of all bade fair to be added. There was nothing to prevent. Upon him grew a dread that perhaps he had too much; did any man have a right to such complete and unalloyed blessings and happiness?

As the play grew, as its scope widened, Lillian became more firm in her refusal to have any public share in it. The meretricious standards of fashion, the foibles of the day, were sketched with merciless precision, as contrasted with the artless simplicity of *Brother Jonathan*. Lillian unremittingly worked over the dialogue, ever putting in something new and apt, holding up to ridicule the smug conceits which she daily encountered, with a sparkling reality that amazed Tyler. Indeed, she confessed that she had drawn much of this from real life, as he drew *Brother Jonathan*.

"But not a word—don't breathe a word, even to Wignell or Hallam!" she pleaded, and Tyler promised anew, and kept the promise.

"The Contrast." Tom Wignell was responsible for the title, in a burst of delighted roaring mirth. It was Wignell, indeed, who thrust the play under Hallam's nose.

"Wait for the right moment, till we're rehearsing 'Romeo and Juliet,'" said he. "When Lewis is playing *Romeo*, he's in excellent good humor; he forgets his fifty years and becomes young and passionate again."

So here, rehearsal ended, he gave Hallam the completed play.

"A tasty bit for the managerial eye, worshipful sir," said he, and screwed up his face, adopting a nasal drawl. "Why, aint cards and dice the devil's devices? And the playhouse, where the devil hangs out the vanities of the world on the ten-

AN AMERICAN COMEDY

terhooks of temptation—you won't catch me at any playhouse, I warrant you! How's that, Lewis? The speech is mine, the character is mine, I speak for it this minute and must have it! But read the comedy, and rejoice."

Hallam read it. He called the company together, and in huge delight read it to them all. Tyler, who was present, was astonished by the enthusiasm evoked. But had Hallam accepted it? he asked.

"Accepted it?" roared Hallam. "Sir, the play is in production! Now let's discuss the terms."

These mattered little to Tyler. He signed what was put before him, and rushed off to tell Lillian the news. Sitting in the prim little reception parlor of the Academy, he told her, under his breath.

Her eyes widened on him—not in ecstatic joy, but in swift terror.

"Royall—I am afraid," she murmured. "Afraid! Except for your sake, I'm almost sorry that I ever put pen to paper! None of them know—upon your honor?"

"Upon my honor," said Tyler. "Not a soul suspects that I'm not the sole author. And why worry? There's nothing in the play to betray your hand. I'll sneak you in to one of the rehearsals."

"No, no! I'll have nothing to do with it!" she exclaimed. "Nothing! That's final. Not now, nor later."

In vain he attempted argument and protest; she remained adamant. And when Mistress Lillian was adamant, there was nothing more truly adamantine in this world. Tyler argued until Miss Semple, scandalized by the length of this visit, rattled the door-knob significantly; it did him no good, and he departed knowing that he, and he alone, must be known as author of "The Contrast."

He thrilled to his name on the announcements. The newspapers were full of the news; a play by an American was a huge novelty. The publicity increased, the rehearsals were on, the night of the first performance arrived.

TYLER called that afternoon at the Academy, to be coldly informed that Mistress Lillian was indisposed. He was *persona non grata*, most emphatically so, now that it was known that he was actually a playwright and an associate of players. In fact, he received a note next day requesting that he would never again bring the evils of dissolute living and vice before the eyes of the innocent young ladies of the Academy by presenting himself there. He tore up Miss Semple's horrified epistle with a laugh.

He might well laugh. The play was an enormous success; it was, on the instant, the talk of the town. The sensa-



"Man, it's wondrous fine!" Wignell exclaimed. "Those two girls—perfection!"



tion it created was tremendous. Its ridicule of the vices then so fashionable in England, its authentic American note, its open derision of smug hypocrisy and above all its piercing cleverness, made it a mad success overnight.

During three days, Tyler was overwhelmed by the publicity all this entailed. And during these days, he heard nothing whatever from Lillian Gentry. He wrote letters, he sent messengers; Mrs. Hallam went to the Academy and was turned away from the door. "The Contrast" played to crowded, delirious houses and all New York raved about it.

At length Tyler, vaguely conscious of an impending storm and a bit alarmed, braved the den of the lioness in person. He was resolved to see Lillian, to speak with her, at any cost. Tom Wignell, in whom he confided to a certain extent, accompanied him as far as the corner,

deeming it best not to defile the Academy with his presence.

Tyler, upon mounting the steps, had just rung—when the door opened and a number of ladies came forth, Miss Semple herself bidding them adieu. Upon sight of Tyler, standing aside to give them passage, there was a flutter; he was conscious of stern looks, of chill glances. Then, as he stepped to the door, Miss Semple firmly closed it in his face—but not entirely. Tyler's foot intervened.

"Good morning, madam," he said, through the crack. "I have come to see Mistress Lillian, and I intend to see her if I must scandalize your school and the entire neighborhood. Will you have the kindness to practice the courtesy you no doubt teach your pupils?"

Thus challenged, Miss Semple flung wide the portal and planted herself in the opening, her very ringlets shaking with indignation.



The play was an enormous success; it was, on the instant, the talk of the town.

"You unspeakable scoundrel," she declared, "you have been told—"

"No falsehoods, if you please," broke in Tyler. "I'm not asking your opinions. I'm here to see Miss Lillian."

"That viper whom I have sheltered in my bosom is no longer here," was the retort. "Now will you have the goodness to depart?"

"I will not," said Tyler. "Frankly, I don't believe you."

Miss Semple gasped. "Oh! This passes all bounds! We have discovered your low and vicious imposture, sir: A play-actor, a companion of players, indeed! A person who stoops to sell his very soul for filthy lucre! A—"

Tyler broke in:

"Madam, will you have the kindness to summon Mistress Lillian?"

"She is not here. She has been dismissed from her position, upon our learning the shocking fact that she, a teacher in this abode of innocence, became so contaminated by your acquaintance as to share in your disgrace."

"I don't understand, I'm afraid. To what disgrace do you allude?"

"The authorship of this shameful and vile play which has secured such deplorable notoriety, sir, that I must blush at the very mention of it! In all the years that I have conducted this Academy, its good name has never before been sullied. And to think that this calamity should have been caused by a deceitful woman who was trusted and—"

"Apparently you are laboring under a delusion," cut in Tyler coldly. "If you refer to my play 'The Contrast,' Mistress Lillian had nothing to do with it. I, and I alone, am the person responsible."



Miss Semple eyed him with venom.

"From a person of your description, this brazen effrontery might be expected. It is quite useless to descend to falsehood, sir. The ladies who were just here, and who honor this heretofore unsullied institution with their patronage, have traced the matter beyond any doubt. Miss Gentry's association with you, alas, is all too well known. The language used

"Upon my right as the fiancé of Miss Gentry."

Miss Semple gasped again, and drew herself up in dignity.

"So! You would drag down to your own level this young woman whose character and morals you have so insidiously seduced! I would have you know, Mr. Tyler, that she left this place yesterday, after having confessed her fault with tears of shame. Aye, sir, she confessed! She was very lucky to escape legal prosecution, as I told her frankly, but for the sake of her family, whom I have advised of her disgrace, that matter has been waived. I did not ask her destination, she did not impart it to me, and I desire to know nothing of her actions."

Tyler bowed and turned away, accepting defeat. But he was now alarmed. The fact that neither he nor the Hallams had received any news of Lillian was disturbing. That she had been broken down and had confessed her share in the play, indicated only too well what she must have been through.

AS he crossed the street, Wignell joined him with a cheery question.

"Gone," said Tyler. "Dismissed. Disgraced. Left the sacred precincts yesterday and not a word from her!"

"Ha! This demands consultation," said Wignell. "All signs point to the tavern and a touch of the proper spirit. Come along, disconsolate swain!"

"It's no light matter," said Tyler, deeply worried. "Tom, I'll have to confess the truth; don't let it go any farther, on your life." He told Wignell the facts about the play and kept nothing back.

"A bad matter made worse," said Wignell. "So that's how you got such damned fine women characters! Taken direct from the Academy! Well, it's nothing to laugh over. The first thing to do is to scour the town for Lillian. Where does she come from? What family has she?"

"A sternly puritan mother and sister in some upstate town. I forget the name, but I have it wrote down somewhere." Tyler frowned. "She was their sole support, Tom. That damned virago has advised the family of her shame—oh, devil take it all, when I think of the state Lillian must be in mentally, I could wring the neck of that blasted Semple woman!"

"You'll be in a worse state if you don't get a grip on your nerves," said Wignell truthfully. "Now, I'll keep the secret; fear not. Get a letter off to the mother, and we'll go to work frisking the

That face, so wan—
"Lillian!" said Tyler.

in the play, its opinions and speeches, are directly traced to her in three specific cases. She shall never darken these doors again; nor, I trust, will your presence contaminate this threshold."

Tyler smiled. He attempted no further argument; it was obvious that Lillian had, indeed, drawn her characters, and had used words and phrases, from the very life.

"Very well, Miss Semple. If you will tell me where to find Miss Lillian, I shall be only too happy to accede to all you desire in the matter of purity."

"I am unable to give you any information," she retorted icily.

"You had best do so, I warn you." Tyler's temper rose. "If you make it necessary I'll raise a scandal that will rock your smug select circles—if I have to obtain a search-warrant and come here with officers!"

"Indeed!" she laughed defiantly. "And upon what right do you base your impudent demand?"

town for Lillian. If she feels that she's disgraced for life, we'll get her out of that frame of mind in no time. Have you popped the question yet?"

"No," replied Tyler. "But I think we understand each other."

"A woman never understands such matters until the bargain's signed and sealed," said the cynic Wignell. "All right. Get the town's name, and write. This afternoon we'll go to work here."

Tyler complied; the town was a small one in western New York named Gibsonville, of which he could learn nothing. Then he set about the search in the city for Lillian Gentry with Tom Wignell's whole-hearted assistance.

DAY followed day, with no result; a week passed. It seemed impossible that she could disappear without a trace, unless some foul play had occurred. Tyler's worry became alarm, and deepened into anxiety of the sharpest. No response came from Gibsonville. He wrote again and again; he sent money; but he drew completely blank. He advertised, he offered rewards, all to no avail.

Meantime, the furious success of the play continued, as it was to continue for months and years. Tyler paid no heed; he withdrew from the company of the players, he would not appear in public, he was wholly absorbed in the search that now became an obsession. Another week passed.

Suddenly, one morning, Wignell showed up at his lodgings in high excitement.

"I've found her!" he cried. "Come along, Tyler, come along! The man's downstairs who carted her things. He knows the place!"

Tyler, half shaven, rushed down and talked with the carter whom Wignell had brought. Yes, the man could give him precise information. He had called at the Academy and had taken Miss Gentry's trunk. Where? To Harlem, to the house of one Gansevoort; a mighty pretty place, said he.

Heaping money on the man, Tyler dressed and hastened forth to the livery-stable where his horses and carriage were kept. In ten minutes, with Wignell at his side, he was driving north out of the city at a mad pace. They came into Harlem with horses foam-white, found the Gansevoort house on the edge of town, found the stolid Gansevoort himself—but nothing else.

Yes, said Gansevoort, Miss Gentry had been with him—but had not given satis-



faction. She had departed the last weekend, leaving her trunk here. There were eight children to be cared for, and what with the cooking and the housework, the job offered plenty to do.

"She was willing enough," said Gansevoort, "but I was afraid from the start she was too much of a fine lady, and so she was. Now we've got a black woman, and the place gets looked after. Where did she go? How do I know? She'll get no reference from me, that I can tell you! Why, I give you my word she'd be till ten o'clock at night just doing the housework, let alone the sewing and darning and keeping the bricks scrubbed!"

Tyler walked back to the carriage with set, bitter face.

"A slavey—my God, a scrub-woman!" he said. "Tom, we must search the town."

They did so, and at the post-house came reward. The tavern-keeper remembered her well. She had taken the post on the Sunday—yes, the Albany stage. A sweet creature, said he, with a big bundle and a mighty sad face: ill, she was. George, the driver, had told him she went clear to Albany; that was all he could tell of her.

Wignell, perforce, returned to New York. Tyler went on to Albany with the carriage, and was there all the week, with no result whatever.

He returned to New York by boat, his search fruitless. Wignell met him; he looked ten years older, and his eyes were like gray stone eyes in a dead face. He had hoped desperately to find some message, some letter awaiting him here; there was no word of any kind.

"I'm packing," he said. "Then to Albany again, where I have searchers at work. If I learn nothing there, I'll go on to Gibsonville. It's somewhere in the western part of the state."

"Hallam wants to see you—"

"Hallam be damned!"

"But, man, it's about your next play!" cried Wignell. "You must do another at once!"

Tyler turned a look of torture upon him.

"There'll be no next play, Tom. I'm done with it for good and all. I never want to hear, speak or think of the theater again—never! Toss me that carpetbag, will you?"

"But won't you at least see Hallam?"

"I'll see nobody."

THREE weeks later, Tyler drove into Gibsonville. Since his letters had received no answer, and since his search in Albany had produced nothing, he was certain that the answer must be here.

The place was little more than a village, a cluster of farmhouses grouped about a church, a store and a post tavern. When he had put up his horses, Tyler fell into talk with the landlord and asked in regard to Lillian Gentry.

"I don't know of her, your worship," was the reply. "Seems to me I have heard some talk about a Gentry girl who left town; must ha' been afore my time. There's Miss Abigail, and her mother; that's all that's left of the family. Cap'n Gentry, he was killed in the war, fightin' under Gates. I guess he didn't leave much behind him."

"What kind of a woman is Mrs. Gentry?"

"The Widder Gentry? Well, your worship, she's a tarnal proud woman. Right proud family all around, though gosh knows they got nothing much to be proud of, far's I know! I hear tell they used to be rich folks afore the war. They got a fine house, and a farm that keeps 'em in vittles. My wife's brother runs it, and he allows the widder is terrible hard in her dealin's. Her house is the green one up the street, second one past the meeting-house. And if you're aiming to sell her something, use the contraption

on the door that knocks it for you. The pull-bell don't work, and if you knock with your fist they won't never come to the door. Mighty aristocratic folks, you bet; aint fittin' to have such feelin's in this country, but I reckon they aint Tories, account him having been in the army."

Tyler walked up the street, passed the church, and turned in at the Gentry gate. Now that he was here, foreboding deepened to fear in his heart; he knew not what he would find, but had a feeling it would be nothing good. . . .

As directed, he used the door-knocker. The house reechoed emptily to the sound. After a moment, the door opened; he bowed to a young woman, primly attired, who looked at him with eyes of fear.

"Good day," said Tyler. "Is Mrs. Gentry at home?"

"Yes," was the response. "Will you come into the parlor?"

"My name is Tyler. I'm trying to get some information about Miss Lillian—you must be her sister?"

The young woman ushering him into the formal parlor looked at him with eyes filled with actual terror. Before she could make any response, another voice sounded.

"Abigail! Did I hear my name?"

"Yes—yes, Mother," stammered Abigail. "It's a gentleman—" She still looked at Tyler, but now with something very like horror. "It's Mr. Tyler."

"Oh!"

Mrs. Gentry swept into the room with the word. She was an angular woman, tall and severe; in her eyes Tyler read a chill that was a thousandfold more uncompromising than the angry vehemence of Miss Semple.

"May I ask what you seek in this house, Mr. Tyler?" she demanded.

"Why, of course! I'm hoping to get some information about Mistress Lillian. You see, I'm a friend of hers."

"I know all about your friendship," said Mrs. Gentry. "I know about you, Mr. Tyler. The letters which you had the presumption to address here, are awaiting you. Abigail! Get the packet of letters from my room."

"But—good Lord, Mrs. Gentry!" exclaimed Tyler. "I don't know why you should treat me as though I were some enemy! I've no intention of forcing myself upon you. I only hope to learn where your daughter is."

"I have no daughter, Mr. Tyler, except this child Abigail," said Mrs. Gen-

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try inflexibly. She took the packet of letters that Abigail brought, and handed them to him as though the touch of them burned her. "Here are your letters, sir."

"Do you know where Lillian is?" demanded Tyler. A glance at the letters showed that none of them had been opened. "I have sent her money—"

"Your money is not desired here, Mr. Tyler, nor yourself," was the reply. "I must now ask you to leave this house."

Tyler met her gaze. "If Lillian's here, I intend to see her. I don't know why you say that you have no daughter of that name—"

"I had a child of that name who brought vile disgrace upon this house and upon my family," said Mrs. Gentry with uncompromising hauteur. "She forfeited the right to be known by my name, Mr. Tyler. I believe you're fully aware of the shame her conduct in New York has entailed."

"I'm aware that she's a woman who might well be ashamed of such a mother," lashed out Tyler. "A woman of the finest, noblest character, so far above your petty and intolerant viciousness as to put you to shame indeed! And whether you like it or not, I'm going to find her if I have to walk through this house."

Mrs. Gentry turned. "Abigail! Ring the bell for the farmhands, and tell them to eject this obnoxious gentleman of the stage. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Mother," piped up the frightened Abigail. Then, as she looked at Tyler, something came into her eyes—some sudden gusty courage and resolve. "Lillian's in the spring-house," she blurted out, and fled.

Tyler bowed to Mrs. Gentry and walked out of the door, white with fury.

He strode around the house. At some little distance, in the rear, he saw the small structure that must be the spring-house. The *clop-clop* of a churn came to him as he drew near it. Something moved there—someone came into the doorway—a woman, toil-weary and ragged of dress, whose drooping figure was not that of Lillian at all. But the hair falling about her ears and face—that gorgeous red hair—that face, so wan and pallid—

"Thank God!" said Tyler devoutly, as he heard her cry out. "Lillian, Lillian—what on earth does this mean?" He hurried to her, caught her in his arms.

"I should ask what it means, Royall," she said, her breath sobbing in her throat. She regarded him with something of the

same terror Abigail had evinced, a woman's terror, not of the body but of the senses. "I heard—they told me the disgrace was such that you—you were ruined, your career was ended—that I had brought it all upon you!"

Tyler burst into a wild, mirthless, incredulous laugh.

"Good God! Why, it's insanity, rank madness, all of it! They never gave you my letters? Look, here they are, unopened! We've been searching night and day to find you; why didn't you come to me, in New York?"

"I was afraid." Her eyes flickered with the memory of that fear. "For you. Miss Semple—the other women—they were going to get the law upon you, they said. Oh, it may seem strange to you; to me it was terrible, terrible! And I had confessed, had told everything; I was afraid to face you, Royall. I was ill, too; ill and bewildered. . . . A woman has no place to go—"

"You have now, by the Lord!" he said.

IN the little tavern around the corner from the John Street Theater, Tom Wignell sat with Lewis Hallam over a bowl of punch; he was laboriously deciphering a letter.

"Well, speak up!" growled the veteran actor. "What does he say about another play? When is he coming back?"

"He isn't," said Wignell. "Says he's going to Boston and stay there, and be a lawyer—a canting, sniveling rantipole of a lawyer!"

"Are those his words?" demanded Hallam suspiciously.

Wignell grinned. "Well, words to that effect, anyhow, Lewis." Putting out a hand to his mug, he lifted it high. "Here's a toast to him, a toast to Fortunatus!"

Hallam clinked mugs solemnly. "To Fortunatus that was," he corrected. "And to the first play written by an American. . . . Damn it all, Tom, what are we going to do if he won't write another play?"

Wignell emptied his mug with a flourish and wiped his lips.

"Wait; there's a postscript to his letter that answers your question."

"Read it, then."

Wignell leaned forward, peering at the paper with an impish light in his eyes. He traced with his finger imaginary words across the blank lower part of the sheet.

"Here's what he says, Lewis: '*Happiness is where the heart is, and let the world go hang!*' And amen, say I."

The Luck of the Spindrift

A drama of the South Seas comes to its stirring climax.

By MAX BRAND



There was a purple blotch in the center of the forehead. . . . Valdez had come with a guide—but had gone by himself!

The Story Thus Far:

SAMUEL CULVER, an athletic bookworm, supported himself by a job with a San Francisco express company; all his leisure hours were spent in search of a key to the lost Etruscan language.

Then one foggy night he came upon a huge dog determinedly pursuing a car. As he watched, the dog was knocked into the gutter by another car. Culver took the big dog home, revived it, dressed its wound. And next day, thinking it might lead the way to its home, he took it out on a leash. For miles he followed it; then it stopped at a rooming-house, led him upstairs to a room, nosed under the rug and disclosed a little ebony cross.

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The next lead was a stocky man with red hair whom the dog tried to follow; while inquiring about him, Culver met pretty Sally Franklin, and that was all to the good. . . . Then—following the dog to the waterfront, Culver was black-jacked and woke to find himself shanghaied, with the dog, aboard the sailing-ship *Spindrift*.

Next day, at sea, the mate Burke made a speech to the crew: They were going out to the South Seas to find a shipmate, Walter Toth, who was dying, and who had a great store of pearls. But the captain of the *Spindrift*, the hard-bitten Chinkee Valdez, had preceded them by steamship, said Burke, on the same quest.



Someone else appeared on the poop—a girl with golden-brown skin and black hair—the island girl Koba.

Burke was saying: "We're going to try to be on his heels. And if we ever cross his wake, we've got his dog to follow 'im! I've seen to that!"

Burke drove the men hard, but gradually Culver got his sea-legs. And when the Finn, Birger Ukko, was beaten by the bosun because he wouldn't go to the mast-head and "whistle up a wind," Culver intervened, fought the bosun and knocked him out. A treacherous blow from a marlinspike laid Culver low, however, and he was triced up and beaten severely with the cat-o'-nine-tails. Koba came to the forecastle to nurse him. Later he was able to repay her, by saving her from going overboard in a storm.

Culver deciphered for Burke (and for Jimmy Jones the "chaplain") a letter sent by Walter Toth to Valdez; upon this

they based their course to the tiny island of Tapua. And Culver seized a chance to radio a message urging Sally Franklin—Toth's niece and chosen heir—and her fiancé Tommy Wiley, to hasten to Tapua.

Days later, the *Spindrift* sighted the island; Culver, distrusting Burke, leaped overboard and with Koba swam to shore. The next morning Culver came upon Sally and Tommy, just arrived; and when they encountered the men from the *Spindrift* with the dog Napico, Culver took over the beast. With Sally, he found the hut where Toth had died, and a map-tracing indicating where the pearls were hidden. Culver and Sally started upon the trail, with Napico pointing the way. (*The story continues in detail:*)

CULVER became conscious of the darkening of the sun, and he saw that the trail had entered a great tunnel of green. Huge fronds of palms joined

overhead; climbing vines like agile, swiftly twisting snakes, ran up the stems and disappeared; graceful flowering plants hung down from above.

In that pleasant shade he stopped and looked at Sally. She was red-faced and sweating with the hard work of keeping up with his long strides.

"There's Wiley to think of!" he told her. "You've got to go back to him at once. Suppose we meet Valdez? That wouldn't be the place for you!"

"Suppose you meet Valdez," said the girl, "what will *you* do—with your empty hands?"

"I would talk," said Culver calmly.

"And suppose that there should have to be more than talk? Suppose that Napico took the side of his master? And suppose that you—What would you do?"

"Pico?" said Culver absently.

THE dog turned his head and flashed an impatient glance behind him. Then he wagged his tail and lurched against the rope.

But Culver held him firmly.

"It has to come," he said. "Pico has to make a choice between us; and of course he'll choose his master. Of course he will. What else could he do?"

"Does he mean that much to you?" asked the girl.

"I don't know," said Culver. "I don't know how much he means to me. I won't know until he's gone. Then I'll be able to tell you, quite eloquently, I imagine. He's only a dog; but he managed to break through to me. You see, I was living inside walls. They were not even glass walls. I could not see what the rest of the world was doing. Napico, here—well, he dragged me out of thousands of years of the past, and I found myself all at once in the present. Instead of looking at words, I was looking at life. I have a new taste in my throat."

He laughed a little.

"I don't know how to put it," he said. "But suppose, one day, Napico came of his own free will and put his head in my hand?"

"I can see that that would be a great day," murmured the girl.

"Yes," agreed Culver. "It would be a great day. . . . But now you've got to go back to Tom Wiley."

"Do you realize how many times the trails have crossed in the last half-hour?" she asked. "You were striding along alone with your thoughts; but do you realize that I *never* could get back alone?"

"I didn't realize that," he admitted. "Is there nothing to do but take you along?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid," she said. She took out a handkerchief and mopped her face. "Do we have to go quite so fast?" she begged.

"Certainly not," said Culver. "They are not so very far ahead of us."

"They?" she queried.

"There are two. There is the big man—you see where his heel crunched down through the upper crust of the ground? And then there is this."

He pointed out the print of a naked foot, lightly made.

"A woman?" she asked.

"It's too big for a woman," said Culver. "You see how the big toe gripped the ground? That's a man's foot—the foot of a man who's a runner. The big toe gives a great deal of the spring to a runner's stride, you know."

"Is there any poetry to quote for that?" she asked.

"There is Shakespeare," he said, innocent of her faint smile, "when he speaks of Diomedes' step, rising aspiring on his toes. And someone wrote:

*"He rounds the hill; he runs upon the air
And the far towers prick up beneath his feet."*

"Is there poetry for everything, then?" she asked.

"Perhaps there is," he said. "And in the past—that is, before Napico—I used to think that everything had been said that needed saying."

"But now?" she queried.

"Well, now there have been times when the old poets failed me, and I wished that I could write my own lines," said Culver.

"Tell me about that, won't you?" asked the girl.

She had taken off her hat to let the faint stirring of the air cool her more.

"Well," said Culver, "I've wanted lines even about the color of your hair. And particularly from that night you were in my room, I remember a sort of freshness and a happiness around the heart."

She looked past him with considering eyes. "I too remember that night wonderfully well, and I'll never forget some of the things you said," she told him.

"You cautioned me not to speak like that to any other person," said Culver, recalling the conversation suddenly. "But as a matter of fact, I never have." He smiled as he examined his recollection and found it clear. "Because the truth

is," he said, "that I've never felt that way before, and never will again. It was a strange beauty that came to me from you—like the beauty of classic verse: the wings of Pindar, you know, and the melancholy that always goes with a pure loveliness, and which you feel in music at once."

"And Koba—did she never make you happy?" persisted Sally Franklin.

"Let me see. . . . There was once on the ship. She wore an odd fragrance, a perfume which her mother's grandmother, as I remember it, had made and left the secret of the making in the family. It had a strange effect of making the head a little dizzy."

"I'll wager it did. Didn't you talk to Koba then?"

"No," he answered, thinking back to the moment.

"You try to remember," said Sally, with a peculiar confidence, "and you'll find that once at least you told Koba how happy she was making you."

"There was last night," he agreed, as the moment came back to him.

"Ah, I knew," said Sally.

"There was a sound of wind like surf in the trees, and her husky voice blended with it and seemed to express the same thought," said Culver.

"What thought?" asked Sally.

"The thought of peace at the end of the day, and quiet and happy homecoming. As we walked, I recalled her on the ship, and swimming in the lagoon. She has, as you may have observed, an extraordinarily lovely body."

"Yes, extraordinary," said the girl, watching him.

"And as we walked under the palms with the moonlight making the world silver white and soft black, I remembered her in many pictures."

"So you told her about them?"

"At some length," said Culver.

"And what did she do?"

"Practically nothing. While I was talking, she merely sang."

"She sang while you talked?"

"Yes. She sang, softly. Almost like an accompaniment. It showed that her mind was not on what I was saying, of course."

"Poor Koba!" said Sally.

"Poor Koba?" he echoed, surprised.

"I think I know about her now," sighed Sally Franklin.

"You must not judge her entirely from her anger when we passed her," said Culver. "That was inexplicable; but the



unschooled brain is capable of vagaries, as you know."

"I do know," she answered. "And some schooled minds also. Poor Koba!"

"I wonder," said Culver, "if you're implying that I did something wrong about her?"

"Yes. Wrong as the very devil," said Sally.

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Culver. He grew extremely hot of face. "I'm not unaware," he said, "that native women are capable of unusual latitude in some of their actions. Their moral sense has not been cultivated. Koba, however, is not of that type. I gathered that even the great Valdez—and his is a great name at sea—did not have his way with her. I beg your pardon. I'm sorry to mention this."

"I was born in the Twentieth Century, my dear," said Sally calmly.

HE felt that he was driven to an explicit statement. It was difficult to bring out the words, but he forced himself to them.

"The truth is," he said, "that I did not touch her!"

"Oh, no! You didn't touch her body. But what about her mind and soul? What about *them*?"

"Will you please explain?" begged Culver in an agony of apprehension, he hardly knew of what.

"I can't explain," she said.

"Surely there would be some words—" he tried to say.

"No, there aren't any," she snapped. "How old are you, please?"

"I am thirty-five," he confessed.

"Are you? Without glasses, you don't look it. You look hardly more than a boy. And sometimes I think that you are less than a boy; because in spite of all your books, you are so desperately—ignorant!"

She selected the word deliberately, and he winced.

"Perhaps I am—I dare say I am," admitted Culver.

"Don't be humble," she exclaimed.

"I'm only telling you, with honesty, what's in my mind. If you could explain what I've done wrong—"

"But I tell you, I *can't* explain!"

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. The pain that was in him was unlike anything he ever had known. The whip in the hands of Burke had sacrificed the flesh only. Here, if he could draw her into words, might be found the explanation of all the differences he had felt, his whole life, between him and other men. But she would not speak! Even the quest of Valdez seemed as nothing compared to this Wishing Gate which he had reached, and found the lips of the oracle dumb!

"You are very angry," said Culver slowly, feeling his way forward through the dark jungle of his thoughts. "And in the world there is only one person whose anger I would wish to avoid, it seems to me. I don't know how to explain. But the days at sea, and the shame and the anxiety, have been seeming like a bad dream. . . . Did you ever spend a sleepless night and think of follies and shames until morning came?"

"I have," she answered, frowning.

"And when the dawn came, there is a coolness in the air, and a quiet. If the wind has blown all night long, it dies out in the morning, as a rule, and coldness and the peace seems to come from heaven. It puts a hand on your forehead and on your heart, don't you think?"

"I know," she nodded, still frowning.

"You were that for me when I saw you in Tapua," said Culver.

"Ah, there you go again!" she cried.

"I'm only telling you the utter truth. Can't I speak it?"

"I suppose I have to hear it now," she murmured, looking away from him.

"But it's true," said Culver, "that when I saw you, there was a pause in time. The whole universe stood still for me, and I heard music in the silence. It's strange, isn't it? It was like music; looking at you was like that for me."

"Tell me," said the girl; "do you know that I'm engaged to Tommy Wile?"

"I do know it," he said, and waited.

"Do you think he loves me, truly?"

"I think he does," said Culver honestly, looking back to certain expressions which he had seen in the face of that young man, and remembering certain qualities of voice.

"Then would his heart be rather broken if I turned him away?"

"I dare say," agreed Culver, still waiting anxiously for the key to this talk.

"Could you go on talking to me as you were just talking now—a moment ago?"

"As long as I'm near you," said Culver. He hunted in his mind for an image; and finding it, he said: "Are you ever weary of watching seagulls in the wind, going up hills and down valleys in the air, and turning sharp corners in the streets of some invisible happy city? Are you ever weary of watching them? Well, the truth is that it's like that, and I'm never weary of watching you and listening, no matter what you say, or what you do with your hands."

"If I'm not to wring Tommy's heart, and turn him away, don't say another word!"

Culver, amazed, was beyond words.

"It shall be exactly as you wish," he said at last.

"Could you find something out of your poets to tell me what is in your mind just now?"

"I can only think of this," he said:

The thought of her comes to me like the fall

Of dew that gilds the morning, like the fall
Of rain in the hot, dusty throat of August;
Like wings between the morning and the night

She comes to me; but only in my thought."

She considered this for a long moment, and then, sighing, turned to take up the trail. He went ahead with the dog. He could not understand women!

Chapter Twenty-one

NOW that she had confessed her weariness, he went on more slowly in consideration of her. It seemed strange to Culver that she should lack physical strength, because in his mind's eye he considered her complete, perfect, armed at every point like a true Achilles, the swiftest, the most tireless, the most terrible of the Greeks. And in that old Greek conception which placed such qualities apparently above all moral considerations of character, it seemed to him that he found a right place for the girl. Such people are inexplicable. Culver would give up attempting to understand. She chose to marry the clear-eyed lad Tommy Wile. Therefore it should be so. Her will was sufficient unto herself,

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and it would have to be sufficient unto him. He accepted blindly, but with a certain remorseless aching of the heart. He tried, as he went down the dimness of the trail behind Napico, to think back to his days of books; but they seemed far away, hidden in a dust-cloud and a rattling of dead leaves.

He was half adrift in these struggles of the mind, when the dog for the first time lifted his nose from the ground, and as though he had the quarry in view, strained forward with a high head. They were in a scene like a romantic stage-set, the back-drop consisting of a cliff set back in terraces, with a decoration of tropical green on each terrace. A stream of water pitched over the top of the highest terrace, and leaped down step by step until in the lowest step of all, the tradewind took the shattered column and blew it aside into a mist that fell soundlessly. There was a noise of thunder, therefore; but it hung always above them in the sky; the nearer sound was a continual hushing of soft rain.

The dog went straight on toward the cliff. Near two large trees which leaned together as if for mutual support, Napico struck a stand like a pointing dog, his head thrusting forward, his eyes almost closed as he studied the wind and growled, his big ruff bristling.

The girl saw first, and cried out. After that, Culver made out a glimpse of a brown body stretched in the deep grass between the two trees, with the head turned, and the half-shut eyes peering out at him. There was a purple blotch in the center of the forehead.

Napico, pulling to the end of his lead, sniffed once at the dead man, then turned at right angles and tried to make away through the grass.

Valdez had come with a guide, but had gone by himself! At the foot of one of the trees lay a small heap of rotten wood-fiber and earth that had been scraped out of a hollow in the trunk. That must have been the hiding-place selected by Walter Toth. No doubt the islander who guided Toth had had a glimpse of what was taken from the cache, and Valdez had decided that it would be impossible to let him keep the information and live.

Culver looked up along the new trail of Valdez toward the green wall of the jungle. The foliage, wavering in the wind, had a new significance, because it might be covering the watchful eyes of Valdez at that moment. He looked back to the dead man. The half-open eyes

still seemed to consider the world with puzzled concern.

"Are you all right, Sally?" Culver asked, not daring to look at her.

"I'm all right," she answered in a muffled voice. "But look there, look there! They've found us! What will they do?"

KOBA came first, walking lightly, like one about to break into a run. An air of triumph made her seem taller, and in fact she had won an important race. The weakness of Sally Franklin, which had slowed Culver so much on the trail, the foolishness of high heels and binding skirts, might be the ruin of them both now. For Koba, when her tantrum passed, had obviously rushed back into Tapua village to pass on to the crew of the *Spindrift* the direction in which Culver was traveling through the hinterland. Behind her now came red-faced Burke, Birger Ukko, George Washington Green, Constantine, Alec, Will Carman, Sibu of Borneo, Latour, Francolini, and even old Peterson the Negro cook. All the veterans of the *Spindrift* were there, ten men of almost as many nations, as hard a lot as one could pick up in a journey around the world.

Culver drew back a little. A weakening in his knees told him that he would have run for it if he had been alone; but Sally's presence chained him to the spot.

"Will they do you harm?" she asked. "I'll be safe with them if you want to take care of yourself."

He managed to twist a smile onto his lips. Then he leaned and opened the right hand of the dead man, still tightly closed. It was almost as warm and moist as life; and in the humid palm was a little globe of milky translucence.

He picked it up. The light in it watched him like an eye. It was one of those rare distillations of wealth. That was what gave it its soul, he thought. Imitations could be made that looked exactly like it, and that would have to be tried on the teeth of the expert before they were known to be false. This was simply a freak of patient nature, worth because of its rarity, perhaps thousands and thousands of dollars, a pearl of large size and perfect roundness.

He showed the gem to the girl. "This is yours," he said. "Put it away."

They came on with hurrying strides, the men of the *Spindrift*. Burke shouted out something filthy and venomous from a distance; then he was at a halt near the dead man, and the rest of them banked



"The dog comes on board, and nothing else!" hailed Valdez.

up on either side of him, their hands helplessly swinging. For Napico, when he saw them coming, had planted himself between them and Culver. Now, leaning forward until the strain made the lead tremble, he begged with a high-pitched, constant snarling to be turned loose on them.

"Shoot the beast, and let's get our hands on Culver," said George Green.

Koba, at that, began to dance from foot to foot, springing up and down and pointing her slim brown arm at Culver.

"You see? You see?" she cried. "Oh, the lie in your belly, may it burn your heart now!"

Burke said: "You ratted on us, Culver. And by God, we're going to have the hide off you for it. What's happened here? Who shot this fellow? That's right, Ukko!"

"Look out!" cried Sally. "There's one behind you—turn around! Look out!"

"He's all right," answered Culver. "He's a friend to me."

BIRGER UKKO came up almost to the side of Culver. He stood there now with a little blunt-nosed revolver that seemed to have been specially made for his own short, compact inches. He waited in a silence, his slant, Oriental eyes surveying his shipmates watchfully. And they gave plenty of heed to him, for in a fight the Finn was proverbially deadly.

"What did they *find*, is the main thing, not the skinning of Culver," suggested Alec. "Valdez gets this bird to guide him in; but what did he shoot him for, unless the brown fellow had seen more than was good for him to know?"

"They found so much," said Sally, "that they left this behind. Valdez left it behind, and went off with pocketsful of

the rest. He couldn't bother to wait and make sure of everything."

She held out on the palm of her hand the big pearl. The sun struck it and filled it with light, until it grew larger than a moon in the eyes of the sailors. Big Burke groaned slightly.

"Take after him, you fools!" he shouted at his men. "Why are you standing and looking? There's the way Valdez went!"

"How far would you stay on his trail without the dog to show you how?" demanded George Green, contemptuously.

"Lay forward with the dog, Culver!" commanded Burke. "Lay forward, man!"

"Beat him!" cried Koba, rather misunderstanding this talk. "You promised to beat him till he screamed, if you caught him—and here he is!"

"Wait a minute. Heave to! Hold on a minute," answered Burke. "The fact is that we need you, and you need us, Culver. I take it that this is Miss Franklin, that I saw in San Francisco; I take it that when you used the wireless that day to send a message, you were using it to send a call to her. Is that right?"

"That seems to be right," said Culver.

"You had to trick us," said Burke sadly. "You couldn't play a fair, open, sailorly game with us!"

This speech from Burke caused Culver to blink a little; and then, for all the simplicity of his nature, he could not help smiling a little.

Burke went on: "If you want to help her to her share of what Toth got, how'll you ever twist it out of the hand of Valdez except with us helping? Don't that make sense to you?"

"Do you understand?" asked Culver, turning to the girl. He laid a friendly hand on Ukko's shoulder at the same time. The Finn looked down at the hand of Culver, and then back to his face, without expression. But it was plain that he had committed himself definitely to the side of Culver, in spite of the odds. "You understand?" repeated Culver.

When she was silent, watching him with an odd mingling of despair and amusement which he could not understand, he added to Burke: "I think it is time for us to unite our strengths. You have the hand-power; we have the nose of the dog to find the way. But if we join you, will you promise that Miss Franklin shall have her proper half of whatever is recovered from Valdez?"

"Promise it? Of course I'll promise it!" growled Burke.

"And the rest of you?" asked Culver, in his quiet voice. "I think it might be a proper procedure to lift your right hands and swear to it."

"Leave me see what hand don't go up!" exclaimed Burke, looking savagely around him.

The sailors put up their hands. They seemed a bit shamefaced about it. But they all pronounced the two words.

"Get on, then. Get on, for God's sake!" called Burke, and Culver stepped out on the trail. For a moment Napico still lingered at his heels, half protesting, as though he felt these enemies to the rear needed more attention than the trail to the front; but presently he had forgotten everything except the scent, and was following it eagerly through the tall grass.

It was hard work almost from the start. On the outward journey Valdez had surrendered to the leadership of a guide, but for the back trip he apparently had trusted to certain landmarks, or perhaps to an innate sense of direction. By this compass he steered a course which took him through heavy going a good part of the way. His enormous strides and leg-power had taken him forward through heavy growth which flogged the body of Culver as he pressed on at the heels of the dog. Behind him came either Alec or George Green, who seemed rather at home in this sort of going. After them the way was fairly beaten down, and at the rear of the column came Sally and Koba.

The hot work put up the blood into the head of Culver, so that his thoughts came to him disjointedly; but he could not help wondering at the companionship which had been established between the two. Sally, struggling forward with her head more and more to one side as she grew exhausted, was being helped forward by the islander. And Koba had an excess energy for talking also. Once, as he looked back across a clearing before plunging at the heels of the dog into the green wall beyond, he recognized the gestures with which Koba told the tale of Jemmison, and the fall of the bosun, so that he could guess that the girl was telling once more the tale of the ship and the fighting of her "much man." And once again, as he came down a sharp slope just beyond sight of Tapua, he heard a sudden silver ringing of laughter behind him, and knew that the girls had struck upon something mutually amusing. Could the subject be he, again?

As he moiled up the next slope, his arms aching from holding the tireless horses that strained and charged in the body of Napico, he returned to the dreary thought that he never would understand the minds of the people around him. To the end of time they would be mysteries to him, he felt, and the wall of obscurity still would close him around to his dying day. So he would still remain a target for laughter; he would still be absurd, and never know what his own absurdities might be. So, as he walked on through the humid hot green behind the dog, he felt that untold leagues of distance were lengthening out between him and the girl. And then, coming over the next rise, he looked up, and saw that the town of Tapua was spread out neatly beneath him, and beyond it the blue peace of the lagoon with the reef marked in white like a scar across the face of it, and near the harbor entrance, its sails feebly taking the wind that was yet masked in the lee of the island, there still within the curve of the harbor's arm lay the *Spindrift*, making slowly toward the open sea!

Chapter Twenty-two

THAT took the weariness out of their bodies, you can be sure. The sailors broke past Culver and the dog, floundering ahead with great shouts. For they knew why the ship was sailing. They knew that Captain Valdez, having crossed the southern seas and caught up his prize, had found his own ship conveniently waiting for him in the harbor. No doubt he had learned that the tough old veterans of his crew were ashore. So, perhaps picking up a few hands in Tapua, he probably had rowed out to the *Spindrift* and boarded her as he had a legal right to do; and now, a bit short-handed but in perfect comfort, he had the way open to sail to any part of the world with his fortune.

What complaint could the others offer? If they tried to complain, they simply were accusing themselves of sea-robbery in having stolen the ship; and another name for robbery at sea is piracy. Their hands were completely and perfectly tied. The complete irony which underlay their situation overwhelmed them all. Even George Green forgot his sinister dignity to curse as he ran hopelessly forward. Little Sibu, in a catlike passion, ran forward, dropped to the earth to tear at the grass and beat the ground, then sprang

up and ran ahead once more, like a rabbit running from the hounds. Burke, drunk with rage as with whisky, staggered as he ran.

Even Sally Franklin was crying out something about stopping the ship; but in what way *could* it be stopped? There was surely not a soul of the company who felt the slightest pleasure except Culver, alone. For two selfish reasons that shamed him, his heart was lightened. Wealth would only widen those leagues which already separated him from Sally Franklin; and on the ship was the master of Napico. The poor dog, struggling down-headed along the slope, pulling as violently as when the journey inland began, could not fit into his brute's mind the meaning of that distant picture of the ship that was departing. He could only know the scent which lay under his nose and which meant the road back to the master. But if he did not reach Valdez now, who could tell how long it would take before he began to be Culver's dog in fact?

SO Culver, as he stumbled down the hill, took a grim comfort out of this moment. He permitted himself that selfish pleasure for a moment only. Then his better side began to assert itself.

Alec was shouting something about getting the tug and putting to sea after the old ship, before it found the wings of the tradewind and sailed off beyond their reach. There was a ghost of a hope in that. The sailors were well in the lead to rush after that chance, when Culver came down into the first street of the village with Sally. When he looked around, amazed, he saw that Koba had not come all the way with them. Instead, she stood on the verge of the inland wall of green, waving a hand and laughing. And somehow he knew that the anger was gone out of her, and that *he* was the subject of her mirth. Some secret, some absurdity about him, must have been imparted to her by Sally. For Sally also, turning to wave, was smiling in spite of her weariness.

They had not gone onward for five minutes before the frantic figure of Tommy Wiley came toward them, almost on a run. He was as red and sweating as though he had been a member of the party all day long. Where had they been, he wanted to know; and why was no message left for him? And again, with a furious look at Culver, where had they been? he demanded.

Sally answered him the most direct way by showing him the pearl in the palm of her hand.

"We've found the place," she said, "but Valdez apparently was there before us. We found his dead man, and one pearl, and— Help me, Tommy! Help me to catch up with the sailors! There's still half a chance that we can get out to sea and catch the *Spindrift* and that rascal and what's due to us."

That was sufficient explanation for Tommy Wiley. The three of them hurried toward the pier where the tug was fast—and to give them hope, smoke was floating lazily from its stack. Tommy told them, in broken words, what had happened to him during the day, and how he had talked everywhere to everyone without getting so much as a hint of Valdez. The name was known everywhere, but no one had laid an eye upon Valdez. So a queer hope came to Culver that after all, the man he dreaded meeting might not be on board the *Spindrift* at that moment. And yet he knew, with a strange surety of the unconscious mind, a queer working of instinct, that he would find Valdez somehow, at the end of this trail. He could put his trust in Napico to that extent, at least.

They found a dense group of natives and a few nondescript whites gathered at the foot of the pier beside the tug to listen to the bargaining. Above other voices, that of Burke was shouting: "I'll tell you, man, that we'll pay you *twice* a hundred when we get out to the ship."

"Man and boy," answered a rolling bass voice, "I've followed the sea fifty years, and I've never seen a sailor that wouldn't be damned rather than pay a debt when he's offshore."

"You fool!" shouted Burke.

"Ah, and I'm a fool now, am I? We'll just call it two hundred dollars that I want paid into my hand before I take off a line for you," said the captain of the tug.

He sat on top of the superstructure of the tubby little boat, smoking a pipe upside down, with a brimless hat stuck on the back of his head. He was gray and fat and sixty, a true wharf-rat, and he seemed to enjoy this argument more than the hope of money. It seemed a bit strange to Culver that Burke and his men did not rush the tug at once and do as they pleased with the boat afterward. Perhaps the answer lay in the native stevedores and beachcombers who stood about, grinning. No doubt they were at

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the beck and call of the captain, and there were enough of them to throw the sailors into the sea. That might have explained the patience of Burke, whose face seemed red and swollen enough to explode, but who lifted his voice only to argue.

"We're robbed by the bloody captain! We're robbed by Valdez, and he's the father and the grandfather of all robbers!" shouted Burke. "Will you stand by if you're a sailorman and see other poor devils robbed?"

"I'll have two hundred dollars before I can lift a line from the pier-head," answered the captain, and took a long draw at his pipe.

"Oh, for the name of God and the mother of heaven!" groaned Burke. "Is there no man or mercy in the world that'll give me the money to pay this old devil, and let us get after a thousand times what he's asking?"

"Old devil, am I?" echoed the captain of the tug. "We'll call it an even three hundred, or there's not a line that I'll lift from the pier."

Burke, when this Pelion was piled upon Ossa, lifted both fists to the sky in wordless complaint and appeal.

"Have we that much, Tommy?" asked the girl.

"We have the tickets back and a hundred and fifty," said Tommy. "But we can't spend all—"

The *Spindrift* was standing well out now, toward the reef, nearing the verge of the smooth harbor water, though none of her sails were perceptibly filled by the breeze. She was, as the saying went on board the ship, holding her steerage-way by the flap of her canvas. Just beyond her nose, she was pointing toward the darker blue of the open sea, roughened by a fresh wind. Once in that, she would be off like a gull and sail forever.

CULVER said to the girl: "Let me have the pearl, if you please."

"Wait!" protested Tommy. "It looks like ten thousand dollars' worth of—"

But Sally already had passed the jewel without a word to Culver. He gave a strange look into her tired face as he took it. Then he stepped forward off the pier and over the gunwale of the tug, with Napico beside him.

The captain jumped down from the top to confront him.

"I'll have 'em break you in two and duck you to the bottom of the harbor!" he shouted at Culver.

"Look at this," said Culver, "and see if it's worth our trip out to the ship."

And he laid the pearl in the hand of the captain. Against that calloused, grimy palm it shone with a peculiarly tender beauty and brightness. The captain gave it one look, then folded his pudgy grip over it.

"On board, then, all of you!" he shouted. "Cast off, Mickey! On board, on board! What are you hanging back there for, if you're so keen to go? If I won't take you for money, maybe I'll take you for fun!"

He gave Culver a look. He was a much-changed man. And a moment later he was in his cabin at the wheel, sounding bells.

That was how they came to head across the lagoon with the sailors from the *Spindrift* clustered forward, eagerly reaching out after the prize with their hopes.

Burke got to Culver in a passion of gratitude. He said: "I'll be remembering this to the end of my days, Culver. There was the damned square-headed Dutchman, and there was me, and him like a fence in front, and me like a horse with the hobbles onto it. And Culver come and boosted me over. Look and listen to me, man. If there's nobody else that lays a hand on a bit of the stuff, except one, you're to be the man. May the mother that bore me, and the priest that blessed me, and—"

The coldly considering eye of Culver for some reason stopped this enthusiastic outbreak.

"Ah, man," said Burke, "you wouldn't be remembering old scores against a shipmate, would you?" And he hurried away forward to join the others.

Tommy Wiley was saying nervously to the girl: "But every stitch of everything we have, left back there to the cockroaches in Tapua—and what—"

"Hush, Tommy," said the girl.

She lay flat on her back on the after-deck, which sat low down over the green combing of the wake. She had her eyes closed and her arms thrown out sidewise.

"Where is he?" she asked.

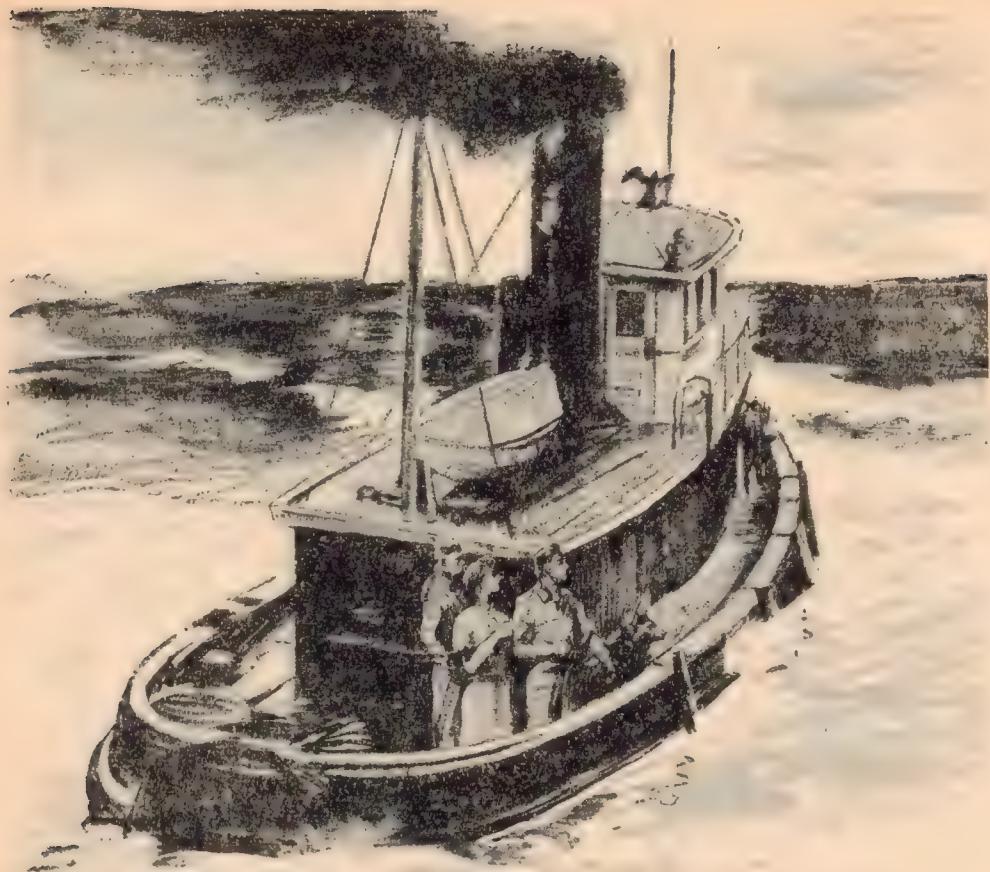
"Culver?" interpreted Tommy, frowning. "Why, he's standing here."

She did not open her eyes but held up one hand. Culver sat on his heels and took it.

"You didn't mind, did you?" she asked.

"Mind? I don't understand," said Culver.

"You didn't mind the laughing, did you?" she repeated.



Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson

"Your laughter and Koba's? Certainly not," said Culver. "It may have helped you through some of those last tired miles. Laughter, I believe," said Culver, "is in the nature of a narcotic; it relieves the tension of expectation and worry."

"Is there a good word among the poets about that?" she asked, with a smile trembling at the corners of her mouth, and going out again at once.

Still she did not look up at him; and the heart of Culver died in him as he saw that mockery hidden as it was about to appear. He put down his head a bit and considered. But all he knew how to do was to answer a question honestly, no matter how lightly it might have been asked. Then he was saying: "There is something in the poets, I dare say. Let me think. There is this, at least:

*"Let not my ladder be her golden hair
For climbing to her heart, but let it be
Her sweet, clear laughter, like a winding stair."*

"Ah, I like that," said Sally. She was still, drawing deep breaths.

Then she said: "It was better to laugh and to have her laughing than to have her knife in your back, wasn't it, Samuel? Or better than to have her own heart broken, don't you think?"

He tried to follow this explanation, but found that it was very difficult for him.

"Do you understand?" she asked.

"I hope that I shall," said Culver.

"Samuel," she murmured, "if you make me pity you, what shall I do? On top of all the rest, if you make me pity, won't I be lost forever?"

"Pity?" he echoed, deeply hurt. "I hoped that I hadn't deserved that!"

"Ah, don't you understand? Won't you understand?" she asked. "Tell me something, quickly, out of some tremendously great poet, as old as the neolithic age, at least—tell me something about misunderstanding. Please do!"

In his troubled mind he searched. "There is this, perhaps," he said at last, and quoted:

*"I pray for dawn. The darkness is a sword
That pierces me. I pray for heavenly light
And truth that is the vision of the Lord."*



"Ahoy the tug!" thundered a voice that seemed to boom down out of the sky. "Keep away and give me sea-room!"

"Tommy!" whispered the girl. The tall lad came hurrying to her. "Sit down beside me, please," she begged. "Stay close to me—I'm almost a thousand leagues away from you."

Culver stood up and stepped back from them, for he felt he was not wanted. And the first salty sea-wind cut into his face with a familiar chill. They were rounding the reef now. The uproar of it was musical and surprisingly distant. He knew how those voices sounded when they were shouting at his ear. Narrowing his eyes, he could see, and only barely see, the little rift through which the sea had driven him to safety, beyond the reach of Jemmison's boat-hook.

But the *Spindrift* was there on the starboard bow right ahead, her upper sails now filling, and her whole slender body giving gracefully to the wind as though she loved it. She was gathering speed, but the tug still was able to walk up on her, hand-over-hand. Burke made his men get out of view below, and he stowed himself with them.

"If Valdez sees my mug," he said, "there'll be general hell to pay before he ever lets us lay him aboard. But if he sees Culver and the girl and the young gent, why, he's never laid eyes on them before, has he? And besides, there's big Napico for him to spot from a long lookout, and that'll be the filling of his eye for him, damn his rotten heart!"

That was why the tug swept up toward the *Spindrift* with only Culver showing near the girl, and young Tom Wiley aft on the boat, with Napico, already strangely excited, standing up with his paws on the rail.

"Ahoy the *Spindrift*!" shouted the captain of the tug. "Throw us a line, will you?"

"Ahoy the tug!" thundered a great voice that seemed to boom down out of the sky. "Keep away and give me sea-room. Keep off!"

THE voice came from the waist of the ship, a bit aft, toward the break of the poop; and something in Culver rose up to recognize the sound, as though it were something which he had heard in his dreams and had been waiting for. As for Napico, he whined with eagerness, and tried to climb right up on the edge of the rail. Then Culver saw the man who had spoken. He was standing near the rail, bareheaded, his long black hair whipped back from a head that was partly bald above the temples. It was the same profile Culver had seen—and never forgotten—on the night Napico came into his hands. But despite the ugliness of that great beak of a nose and the protruding chin, there was something distinguished in Valdez' look that saved him from the effect of perfect ugliness.

"Sheer off!" he thundered again, and the captain started turning the tug off its course. A groan from the men of the

Spindrift who were under cover sounded like something gone wrong with the engine.

Then Valdez called out again: "Very well, come on alongside—long enough for me to get the dog on board. Lay close alongside, and you won't need a line, Captain. . . . *Hai*, Napico! *Hai*, Pico, my boy!"

Napico lifted his nose and howled into the wind with excess of joy.

BURKE, from the after entrance of the tug's cabin, was saying:

"Wait till you see me start, and then go for the *Spindrift*. Swarm out and board her. Alec, you've got that boathook. Bury it in the side of the *Spindrift* like you was lancing a whale, and pull us in close. And hold us there. God help us now—God help us, this is the pinch! Holy Saint Catherine, I promise twelve candles longer than my arm, and—"

"The dog comes on board, and nothing else!" hailed Valdez. "Mind, on board the tug. Nothing but the dog!"

He balanced a rifle in one hand, resting his elbow on the rail as he spoke. And the overtaking wind, increasing every moment, leaned the *Spindrift* with a sound of working gear a low and aloft. Pots and pans in the galley, for harbor usage unsecured, slid away to crashing fall.

Culver, looking up, saw only the face of Valdez, and felt only the tugging vibration of Napico on the lead.

"Hold onto the dog till we're close on board her," groaned Burke from the cabin. "Steady with the dog, Culver, and God be kind to you! Steady, Culver, and it's all in your hands to come in touch with him."

They were swinging close inboard now, with the burdened waist of the *Spindrift* not high above the level of the tug's rail.

"You there below—you on Napico's lead—let him come, now! And board us yourself, if you wish. I want to see the man who can handle that dog without a muzzle on him! What's your name?"

"Culver," he answered.

"Look alive, Culver! Let the dog go—now! And spring up yourself. I'll have a hand for you."

He stretched out his big right hand as he spoke. It was the arm and the hand of a giant, and Culver looked on the gesture with awe. But he could not take advantage of a friendly proffer when he came as an enemy.

That was why he shouted: "Captain Valdez, if I come, it's not as a friend!" "What's that?" called Valdez.

"Ah, God, the fool!" groaned Burke again. "Now out and at him, boys! Hearty, my lads! Out and swarm aboard him, and an extra share for him that puts lead in Valdez. Alec! Right on my heels, old Alec, and give the boathook into the side of her—hard, *hard!*"

Culver heard the rush of feet behind him, and from the tail of his eye he saw them coming, Burke first, with a frantic, convulsed face of effort; and there Alec, with the boathook poised in both hands, and chunky little Birger Ukko next in order.

"Ah-ha?" cried Valdez. "Oh, my prophetic soul!"

And he jerked the rifle to his shoulder to fire. It was not intentional on the part of Culver to loose the big dog at that moment, but the shock of seeing the rifle at Valdez' shoulder had unsteadied him for an instant, and a lurch on the part of Napico whipped the end of the lead out of his hand. An instant later Napico was sailing straight for the arms of his master. His flying bulk knocked the rifle whirling to one side, so that it dropped into the sea after glancing off the bulwark of the tug. And as Alec drove home the boathook, tying the two ships together, the veterans of the *Spindrift* instantly swarmed aboard from the tug.

Culver, with his grasp on the *Spindrift's* rail, gave Sally a strong hand to help her on board. Tommy Wiley, as though he had forgotten her in the excitement, was already there. And Culver was literally the last man to gain the deck of the *Spindrift*. He was in time to see Burke and Birger Ukko open fire on a huge figure that leaped onto the poop and disappeared down the companionway of the after cabin. Napico followed.

"Follow him! After him, lads! Bring the old fox out of his hole!" roared Burke; and like a good leader, he headed the wave of shouting men who poured aft.

Culver, looking undeterminedly to the right and left, saw the tug sheer off, and watched its Captain come out of his cabin, grinning broadly at the mischief which he was leaving behind him. Tom Wiley was already with the rush of the sailors who followed Burke. That, for the moment, left Culver alone in the waist of the ship with Sally Franklin, and he discovered that she was looking in that tense crisis not at the action

THE LUCK OF THE SPINDRIFT

around her, but intently, curiously, into his face. He half expected her to ask, as usual, what the poets could say at such a time as this. Then a gun barked twice, aft, and Burke jumped down the ladder to the deck, cursing, and shaking his fist. Captain Valdez evidently had missed his head narrowly by firing from the top of the companionway into the cabin. The attack had been checked just when it seemed about to overwhelm everything in its first rush.

The ship, as Culver took stock of it, was divided roughly into three commands. Forward and in the rigging were the new hands, including the bosun and also including O'Doul, who was of the veterans; but O'Doul was now whizzing down a backstay to join the old company. The new hands did not stir to join the mutineers. Under the break of the poop were Burke and the rest; aft, there was no helmsman at the wheel, and Valdez apparently commanded the approaches to that deck.

The ship, swaying up into the light wind, began to roll a bit in the swing of the waves, as brainless as an unmanned raft. If a squall should strike her now without a helmsman, the mischief might be quick and great. Whoever had the trick at the wheel had come forward during the excitement, and now the return was blocked. Instead of at the companionway's head, the Captain had now taken post at a small port which opened at the forward end of the poop deck, a little round, single eye that commanded the whole sweep of the deck, and an unusual feature of the *Spindrift*.

He called out in his thundering voice from this place of vantage:

"Will you talk turkey now, Burke, and the rest of you? You poor devils, have you let Burke lead you into piracy, and now do you want to let him lead you into murder also?"

They shrank uncertainly from the voice and the gun of Valdez.

"Here's the time for a parley," he said; "who'll speak up for you, besides Burke?"

Chapter Twenty-three

DURING the small pause that followed, Culver noticed that more than one anxious eye turned not toward the Captain at the port, but upward toward the canvas which was slatting, and the spars jarring most unnaturally against the masts. He himself felt a

distinct unease. They were in a ship without an acknowledged master, as though life were in a body without a brain.

Burke sang out: "I'll talk for myself, and I'll talk for the others, Captain Valdez."

"I'll have no dealings with a mutineer and a ringleader," said Valdez. "I'll see the *Spindrift* go down and all hands aboard her, before I'll talk with Burke. . . . Keep forward there, Ukko! None of you try to sneak aft and get under the break of the poop. I'll wing you, my lads, if you try it!"

Sally said to Culver: "Tell me—are you afraid?"

"I'm sorry to say that I am," he answered. "Does it surprise you?"

She merely watched him, too intently curious to make an answer. It seemed to Culver that all the importance of this moment was somewhat less to her than the reactions she was studying in him.

"He'll talk to me, or he'll talk to nobody!" Burke was saying.

"Why bat your head against a wall?" asked the O'Doul. "Pick out another head, or a couple of them. Pick out George Green and another to talk to the Captain."

To the mutineers, this seemed good advice. Old Peterson, whose age and character gave immense weight to his words, remarked: "Why fight with your luck when you find it? Where would we be without Culver? Pick out Culver to go with George Green and talk to the Old Man."

They turned about and stared at Culver; and he stared back at them, surprised; but since Peterson had identified Culver with their luck, no one was of a mind to challenge the selection of him on the committee.

"Go aft, then," commanded Burke. "Go aft and show him that he's in our hands as neat as can be."

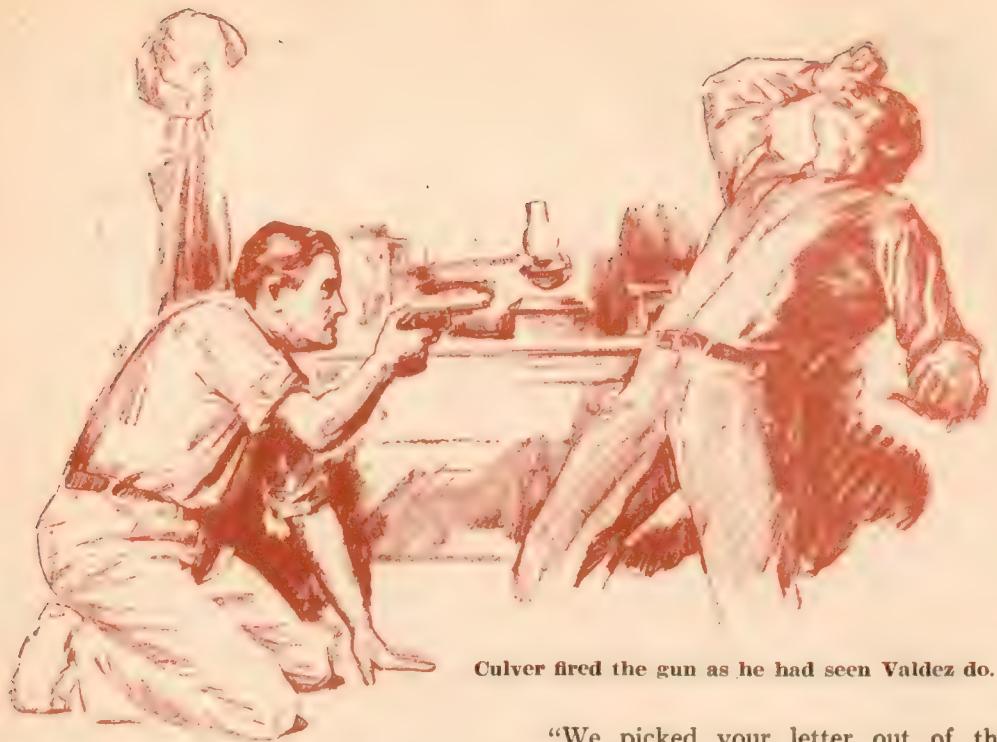
"Send some one aft, first, to man the wheel," suggested Culver.

"And get his head shot off by Valdez as he climbs over the break of the poop?" asked Burke, sneering.

"Three or four men could drop over the rail and hand themselves aft," said Culver.

"Ay, and that's more than a fool's idea," agreed Burke. "Ukko and O'Doul and Sibu—you wildcat—go aft over the rail and man the wheel!"

They were over the side in a moment, only their hands flashing above the rail



Culver fired the gun as he had seen Valdez do.

as they swung aft along the side of the ship.

Culver went under the little round port with its heavy concave glass behind which Valdez had posted himself.

He said: "Now that's a simple idea, but I didn't think that it would come to you lunkheads for a day or two at least—that idea of getting men aft to the wheel over the ship's side. Who thought of that?"

"The new hand, here. Culver thought of it," said Green.

"Ah, Jimmy," said the Captain, "you were right when you said that there was more to him than met the eye, and yet plenty meets the eye, at that. Culver, I'm glad to have you on shipboard. Now, my lads, what do you think of it all?"

"We have you up a tree, sir," said George Green.

"You'd like that, Green, wouldn't you?" asked Valdez, in his deep, rumbling voice. "I could always see the green in your eyes when my back was turned to you. I dare say that there never was a man born who was good enough to be captain over you, Green."

Green said: "We have you up a tree, sir, like a 'possum, and you'll never get away with the stuff you took from Walter Toth."

"Speaking of Toth," said the Captain, "how did you manage to lay such a close course for Tapua?"

"We picked your letter out of the basket," said Green, "and we laid it together, end for end, and made everything out; except we were wrong about the last paragraph, but Culver set us straight there."

"Ah, Culver, I've heard about that," said Valdez. "First and last, you've been a useful fellow to them, haven't you?"

CULVER said nothing, because he could think of nothing to say.

"Now, the way the matter stands is this," said Valdez: "You lads feel that you have me firmly in hand, and yet you ought to know that I've never been had in hand before, and it would be very strange if I cooped myself up here and let you hold the major cards. . . . Jimmy, how are we for water?"

"Water?" said the voice of the pseudo-chaplain from the background. "Why think of water, when there's plenty of wine?"

"How much water have we?" insisted the Captain.

"Call it thirty gallons," said Jimmy Jones.

"Call it thirty gallons," agreed Valdez genially. "And how do we stand for food?"

"The biscuits I won't count," said Jimmy Jones.

"No, don't count them. But the rest?"

"There are a few hams, and some dried beef, and about sixty cans of fish and meat," said Jimmy Jones.

"Good old Jimmy," said Valdez, "what a comforter you are in the pinches! Now, my boys, your new commander, your Burke over there, very foolishly failed to provide a stock of fresh water and provisions the instant he reached Tapua. The result is that you'll all be on short rations within a month. Is that clear? You'll be starving yourselves while Jimmy and I and Napico live here on the fat of the land. In a word, the best thing for you to do is to put Burke in irons, come aft and pile your weapons, and remember that you're sailing before the mast with Captain Valdez, and ready to obey orders."

Green answered to this rather convincing remark: "We can pick up chuck on the way."

"If you enter harbor," said Valdez, "I'll have you jailed as mutineers and hanged afterward for piracy."

"If we enter harbor," argued Green, "how would you let 'em know, on shore, that there's any trouble on board, if we keep you cooped up under deck?"

"You can keep me cooped, but you can't coop up red fire, Green," said Valdez. "With a wind aft, what an easy trick it would be, as we entered harbor, to throw out a supply of oiled oakum and papers onto the deck and let the flames blow forward? Tarred rigging burns fast, Green, and there soon would be a fine tower of jewels for the people on shore to look at. When they came off in boats, a few score of them, what a simple matter for me to come up with Jimmy Jones and Napico, and be rescued with the rest of you!"

There was a silence. Then Valdez added: "You see, Green, I've thought the matter out before I consented to retire below deck. I have no objection to resting here in comfort while you go forward and convince the rest of your shipmates that you never can make a harbor while I'm aboard her; and if you do, I'll slip out of your hands first, and have you hanged afterward. Ay, rub your neck, Green. Stimulate the flow of blood to the brain, but you'll never get past that idea. Facts are hard things to swallow, my lad, but sometimes swallowed they must be."

Green looked hopelessly at the deck, then up into the top-hamper, where the sails were filling pleasantly as the helmsmen brought the ship into the wind. The *Spindrift* was finding her sea-legs again.

"Mutiny and piracy—" he murmured, and ran the red tip of his tongue over

his lips. It was plain that the two terms daunted him a good deal.

At last he broke out: "We can rush the companionway and get down and smoke you out, then!"

"I think you might," agreed the Captain. "But I don't think you would. You know that Jimmy Jones only claims one virtue in the world, and that is the virtue of shooting straight. I would be here with him, and the third of us would be Napico, who carries teeth that some of you ought to remember. No, no, Green: you'll not be rushing the companionway for a long time. But if you did, and if you were winning, by God, the pearls would go into the sea before I'd have them taken away from me by a mutinous crew. You know me, Green. The others know me also. You understand that I'm telling you the truth. Your hands are tied behind you, my lad. . . . But I'll tell you what I'll do: For Burke in irons and the weapons piled aft, here under my eyes, I'll give to every member of the old crew one beautiful large pearl worth ten long voyages, at least. I'll give them ten or twenty years' pay in a lump. You see, Green, I've no idea of cheating people; but I don't want to give away more than proper rights."

He said these things slowly, pausing in his phrases as an actor pauses when he wishes to give the effect of great sincerity and a searching of the heart.

Green said to Culver: "I guess it's right. At sea, he'll starve us out. On shore, we'll be hanged for piracy! There's no answer."

"There is only one, I think," said Culver. "If we go ashore, we can have him put under arrest for murder in Tapua."

"I'd forgotten that," said Green. He exclaimed: "We have you there, Captain!"

"And as for the countercharge," said Culver, "the charges made by a man under arrest for murder are not very seriously considered by the laws of any land, I believe. I don't believe that the crew of the *Spindrift* would be very seriously bothered."

"Do you hear that, sir?" cried Green. "I guess we have you on that count, eh?"

HE laughed with relief and happiness. The black eyes of Valdez dwelt earnestly on the face of Culver as he answered: "Jimmy Jones was right. He is always right. You *are* unusual, Culver. . . . But as for murder in Tapua:

if someone was found dead there, might he not have been murdered by the crew as well as by the Captain? However, I'm a fellow who believes in bargaining. I think it's only fair to say that. And I think that we could come to a very amicable agreement here. Suppose that you let Mr. Culver come into the cabin and talk matters over with me quietly and man-to-man. Wouldn't that be better in the long run?"

"Maybe it would," said George Green. "There's nothing lost trying, and he seems to know the answers."

Culver went back with Green to the others. The voice of Valdez had been heard by them all. Burke was pale with anger and with fear.

"Irons?" he said. "Irons is what he wants for me, is it?"

"Do you dare to go down to him, alone?" the girl asked Culver.

"I hardly dare, and yet it seems that I must go," he answered. "Ukko, can you lend me that gun of yours, in case there is an argument which goes beyond words? But no, if I had the gun, I would hardly know how to use it, and it's better to use talk only."

"Do you mean that you're going with only your bare hands? You can't do that!" cried Sally. "There's no trust to be put in him!"

"Perhaps there is not," answered Culver, sighing; "and yet there is nothing to do but go back to him. So good-by for a moment, Sally."

He turned about on his heel and walked rapidly aft, leaving a silence behind him. He could not help remembering that prophecy of Birger Ukko, long days before, when he had said that someone was about to die on board the *Spin-drift*. That prophecy was still unfulfilled, and Culver had a chilly sense that its fulfillment might not be far away. Behind him he heard Sally crying out to the other men: "Don't let him go! You can see what Valdez wants. He hopes to get Culver away from you because he's afraid of his hands and his brain. *Don't you see that?*"

THE least voice from any of the men would have stopped Culver readily; but no one sang out after him, not even Birger Ukko, who had proved on Tapua that he was willing to die with his friend. And the feet of Culver carried him on unhappily, step after step, up the ladder to the poop and across the raised deck, and then down the companionway; and still

the only voice that was raised to stop him was the last cry from the girl. He had another line from the poets to fortify him as he went down the inner steps:

*"Outcast by men, outcast from all their ways
And like a child left to the hands and talk
Of women—"*

One word from any of the men could have stopped him, but the pity of a woman was not enough. So he came down to the cabin door and stood for a moment in doubt.

Jimmy Jones, forward at the end of the passage, from which he looked out toward the waist with a short-barreled shotgun in his hands, turned to say: "Go right in, Culver. Go right in. The Captain is waiting for you. I've given you quite a name with him."

So Culver pressed down on the handle and stepped into the cabin of Valdez. The man loomed in the farther corner, looking almost as tall as the ceiling. As the door closed and the latch clicked behind Culver, Valdez said quietly, "Take him, Pico!" and at the same time lifted an old-fashioned single-action revolver, fired by working the hammer with the thumb.

Perhaps Pico had been trained to take people by the legs, giving them the weight of his shoulder to knock them sprawling so that his teeth could be at the throat an instant later. That was what Valdez must have expected. Even Culver was amazed when the huge dog, instead of jumping to the attack, reared up with a whine of welcome and placed his forefeet against Culver's chest. . . . The bullet from Valdez' gun drove the head of the dog heavily against Culver.

"Pico!" Valdez cried out, as the dog dropped. He lowered the gun as he shouted, and in that instant Culver was across the cabin floor. His shoulder slammed Valdez back against the wall with a force that shook the whole room. His left hand got the gun; then the fist of Valdez smashed across his jaw with a irresistible sway like the brazen knuckles of a walking-beam. The blow knocked Culver slithering to his knees and half-way back to the door. Through a fog he saw Valdez striding toward him, and into the midst of that dimness he fired the gun as his eye had seen Valdez do, lifting the hammer with the thumb.

The mist remained, but there was no Valdez looming in it. Culver wiped a hand across his eyes and stood up. Valdez was there on the deck, face down,

with one huge hand reaching out almost to Culver's feet.

"Valdez! Valdez!" called Jimmy Jones. "Is it over, Diego?"

Culver turned the lock in the door.

Chapter Twenty-four

HE turned Valdez on his back. The eyes of the Captain were wide open and filled with intelligent life.

"All right, Culver," said Valdez. "You held the aces, this time. Extraordinary that the cards you held should have been Napico. Will you take a look at the poor devil and see if he's quite done for?"

Culver stepped backward, still with his eyes on the Captain and the gun raised.

"Don't worry about me," said Valdez. "I'm done for. I have it. It was a bull's-eye, my friend. . . . But tell me about Napico."

Culver kneeled by the dog and felt for the heart. His eyes refused to dwell on the great red gash across the head, for when he looked at it, he could feel the shock of the bullet striking his own flesh, as it were, and tearing through his body, flesh and bone. To his bewilderment, he found that the huge beast's heart was still beating, rapidly and surely.

"There's still life in him, Valdez!" he said.

"Is there?" asked Valdez. "Now, thank God for that! I've cheated him out of a good deal; I'm glad that I haven't cheated him out of his life."

"Valdez! Valdez! Diego, is it finished?" called the voice of Jimmy Jones, closer to the door.

"Let him in, will you?" asked Valdez.

Culver hesitated. When he saw the red spot which was forming across the breast of Valdez, he felt that he could not refuse the request of a dying man; and yet he had already heard that Jimmy Jones was a real man with a gun.

Valdez read his mind.

"Take the gun away from Jimmy," he said. "There's nothing to fear from him, the moment he sees me like this. Let him come in and leave the gun outside."

Culver unlocked the door, set it slightly ajar.

"Put down the shotgun, Jones, if you please," said Culver. "Captain Valdez is injured, and wants you to come in."

The gun crashed from the hands of Jimmy Jones to the deck. Jimmy Jones came running, his eyes and mouth wide

open like those of an astonished child, and his short legs waddling under the fat of his belly. He squeezed through the door past Culver and fell on his knees beside his friend. He kept making the face of one who screamed at the top of his lungs, but all that came from his throat was a whispering voice that said over and over: "Diego! Diego!"

"Stop moaning and yammering," answered Valdez. "There's nothing to do. I have it, Jimmy. Right through the middle of the sentence. Hold up my head. I don't want to die flat on my back like a woman!"

Jimmy Jones squatted crosslegged and took the head of Valdez in his lap.

"The blood will get all over you, and you'll hate that," said Valdez. "But stay there like a good fellow, even if I make a sloppy mess, will you?"

"You have something here that I came to talk about," said Culver.

"Ah, that stuff?" answered Valdez. "It's over there in the chamois bag, in the drawer of the table."

Culver opened the drawer, accordingly, and took out a small chamois bag. He pulled open the mouth of it and looked down into a great double-handful of pearls, every one a chosen masterpiece of nature, and the whole as dimly luminous in the bag as a cluster of moons behind a sea-mist. He wedged the sack down into his pocket.

In this manner the work of Walter Toth was completed. . . .

"Five minutes ago," said Valdez, "that little sack was worth more to me than anything in the world—always excepting you, Jimmy."

Tears ran unregarded down the fat cheeks of Jimmy Jones. He drew in a long, sobbing breath, but said nothing.

"And now," said Valdez, "it holds so many bright little pebbles. I feel enormously wise, Culver; out of this magnificent hour I could deliver enough moral sentiments to restock the world if Confucius were erased from every book. . . . Reach me a bottle of brandy from that cupboard, like a good fellow. The short, pot-bellied bottle. That, at least, is real Napoleon. Perhaps the same vintage that the Little Corporal sipped after Austerlitz to take the cold out of his blood. Or perhaps he had it before Waterloo, when his stomach was behaving almost as badly as mine does now. . . . How kind of you, Mr. Culver!"

For Culver had found the bottle, which was open and a third gone. He filled

two glasses, offering one to the dying Captain and the other to Jimmy Jones.

"I can't take it. I won't take it!" groaned Jimmy.

"What?" exclaimed Valdez softly. "Not drink a stirrup cup with me?"

"A stirrup cup—ah, God!" said Jimmy Jones. "You are leaving me, Diego!"

"It won't be long," said Valdez calmly. "Unless you stop leaning so hard on the port, it won't be very long before you wash yourself out to sea and follow me, Jimmy. I drink to better luck than that!"

They both drank, and Culver refilled the glasses. He thought of the crew gathered forward in the waist, growing more curious as time went on, perhaps. And he remembered now with a peculiar sweetness the voice of the girl—the voice that had called after him.

A GROAN that seemed human sounded from near the door. Napico stood up weakly, and shook his head, sending the blood flying in a fine shower. He went on uncertain feet toward his master and sat down beside Valdez.

The Captain put his hand on the head of Pico, avoiding the edges of the wound.

"Why, it's only a touch—a mere glancing blow—a little memento," said Valdez. "But it moves you, doesn't it, Culver, to see the poor dog at the side of his dying master? Brings a tear to the eye, I should venture to hope. A scene like this would quite gag a moving-picture audience, I think."

"I dare say it would," said Culver. "I'm not familiar with those performances, however."

"Aren't you? I think I see an envy in your eye, Culver, as you look at me and the dog. In reward for this excellent brandy, suppose I tell you how I won his love, and how you could win it after me."

"I should be very happy to learn," said Culver. "There is some poet who says:

*"I would not go in glory and in robes
But only where love leads me by the hand."*

"You love the big fellow, do you?" asked Valdez, squinting his eyes.

"Perhaps love is not too exaggerated a word," agreed Culver thoughtfully.

"Honest," decided Valdez, "as honest as a lion, and yet with some of the fox in you too. You would take some knowing, Mr. Culver. I was a very foolish fellow to try to get at the heart of the matter with a bullet out of a gun. And yet if Napico had not come in the way, the whole question might have been settled

quite a long moment ago. I could see that you were putting a man's wise head on that great foolish child, my crew. But to come back to Napico: Shall I tell you how I mastered him?"

"If you please," answered Culver, and drew a little closer.

Valdez smiled at this intense interest.

"We had touched at Juneau," he said; "and while I was on shore, I saw five dogs jump a big Mackenzie River husky. The husky rose up out of the heap with hardly a mark on him. Three of the other dogs were able to run. So I talked to his owner, who was standing by admiring, and found out that the dog was a touchy devil, perfect on the trail, but a murderer otherwise, and wild as a wolf. That combination spoke to me, Culver. Napico's master had not the slightest idea how to get even a muzzle on him. He would stand for sled harness, but nothing else.

"So I got four sailors with ropes, and after I'd bought the dog we managed to bring him on ship. I turned over that bunk cabin of mine to him, and fine hell he raised in it for a time. But thirst weakened him, and then I came as the savior, with water. He turned into a devil again. Once more starvation and thirst weakened him, and again I was the savior. I burned him with acid; and then I healed him with salves. I had him wounded, and I nursed him back to life. I gave him stuff that nearly ate the lining out of his belly, and then I gave him soothing oils and brought him back into shape again. It took me six months. He was a starved and staggering wreck before the end of it, but by that time he'd learned to wait for my step and listen to my voice. . . . And there you have him now, the picture of devotion, into which he was cheated. And having been cheated once, you if you are patient enough, can cheat him again. . . . That's a fair return for the brandy, isn't it?"

"I could never do it," said Culver.

"Ah, you couldn't?" asked the Captain. "You wouldn't buy the poor devil's heart with pain—is that it?"

Culver was silent.

"Well, well," said the Captain. "There is more and more to you. May I ask how the devil you knew that I had one dead Tapuan to my account?"

"Napico led me to the place," said Culver.

"But how did you put him on the trail?" asked Valdez.

"That was not difficult. As a matter of fact, I found that Toth in drawing the

little chart of the way for you, had left an impression on the next page in the calendar."

"And you found that?"

"By holding each page in turn so that the light struck it slantwise. I have worked a good deal with books," explained Culver.

"So I see," said Valdez. "Not all lion," he murmured, "but partly fox. I guessed that almost from the first. . . . Jimmy, I'm growing a little weary. And I'm already old. Perhaps it was better to snuff out when there were still feet under me and hands to work with."

"Hush, and be still, Diego," said Jimmy Jones. "Or think of God and your sins!"

"Do I hear *you* naming God with a trembling voice, Jimmy?" asked Valdez. He smiled, but the color was leaving his face now. His swarthy skin turned a yellowish gray, his lips a pale purple.

"As for my sins," said Valdez, "they either are over my left shoulder, or else they are quite strong enough to sink me to the bottom of the sea. And as for God, if He sees me dying, He won't be fooled if he sees me scared into a few prayers at the last minute."

"Ah, but repentance, Diego—" groaned Jimmy Jones.

"What the devil should I repent?" asked the Captain. "Should I repent the free fine life we've lived on the ship? Should I repent the sweet hell that you and I have walked through? Should I repent the beautiful old *Spindrift*? If we've used her to smuggle a bit of an opiate, now and then, we've only given the world sweet dreams. And that's to the right side in our account. No, no, Jimmy, I'll die as I lived—" Here his breath shortened, and he gasped.

CULVER, deeply moved, dropped to his knees and put his arms under the shoulders of Valdez.

"If I lift you, can you breathe better, Captain?" he asked.

"A little better," said Valdez, and Culver raised him somewhat.

Napico, as though he understood that help was being given, began to whine and lick alternately the cheek of Valdez and that of Culver.

"I give him to you, with my heart," said Valdez. "Be kind to him. No, I understand that you'll be that."

"Is there no man or woman in the world to whom I can take word of you?" asked Culver.



Napico looked up with a faint whine. Culver knew that he had become the second master.

The Captain had closed his eyes, his body trembling with the pain that gripped him. Now he looked up, slowly, and regarded Culver with a smile in his misty eyes.

"Lion, fox and fool, in about equal parts, I'm afraid," he said. "I leave nothing behind me, Culver, nothing except the *Spindrift* and Napico. And so perhaps you'll be the master of them both. Who knows? But as for men and women, there's only poor, soggy, damned, desperate Jimmy Jones."

At this, Jimmy Jones broke into violent sobs.

"Don't do that," cautioned Valdez. "You're raining tears all over my face. Touching, Jimmy, very touching—but damned inconvenient! Let me die as dry as possible—except for my own blood . . . except for my own blood."

He was about to speak farther; but when he had parted his lips, his mouth remained open and the word unspoken. His eyes closed.

"He's gone!" said Jimmy Jones. "Oh, God, he's gone, and I'm alone in the

world! Oh, God—oh, God, what shall I do?"

It had seemed to Culver, also, that the last moment had come; but Valdez moved his lips to whisper. Napico on one side bowed his head close to listen, as though he were trying to catch a last soft command; and on the other side, Culver pressed his ear close.

"Be a little kind—to poor, poor Jimmy, will you?" whispered Valdez—and died. There was only a slight shudder of the legs and body, but Culver knew that the big man was gone.

Chapter Twenty-five

AFTERWARD, Culver and Jimmy Jones staggered up the companion-way with the dead body and laid it on the poop. Instantly the voice of the lookout shouted from high above: "On deck, there! Valdez is lying dead as a rat on the poop! Valdez is dead!"

Other voices started shouting. Culver went to the break of the poop and held up a hand that checked the rush of feet aft.

"I told you it was a gunshot!" someone was shouting, triumphantly. "Ay, ay, Culver! Good work, old son!"

"Keep forward for a moment," said Culver. "It's true that Valdez is dead. Is there a man here to say a service over him before he's buried over the side?"

"The pearls! The pearls!" shouted Burke. "What in hell are you yammering about Valdez for? Where is Toth's stuff?"

"Safely put away," said Culver. "Where it will be divided in two halves when we reach San Francisco. One half to the old crew, and one half to Miss Franklin, as Toth provided. . . . Wiley, come aft to me. Sally Franklin, come with him. . . . Burke, will you make the bargain and hold to it?"

There was such an outcry of many voices and such a trampling of feet as the new hands rushed back from the forecastle into the waist to hear more about this strange news, that for a moment there was no reasonable response.

Wiley and Sally Franklin, unhindered, climbed up to the poop. They stopped at the sight of the dead body, the dog and Jimmy Jones crouched beside it.

The girl said in a queer, pinched voice, like a child about to cry: "What have you done? What have you done?"

"Take her below. Take her down into the cabin," Culver directed Wiley.

Then he made out the bawling voice of Burke, calling: "What sort of a bargain is that? You keep the stuff till we make the harbor, and then how do we know that you'll split up fair?"

"The question, as it seems to me," said Culver, "is a fairly simple and unfortunate one: Are we to trust you if you once have everything in your hands, or are you to trust me? I can't help feeling that it would be safer for you to trust me."

"I'll trust nobody," said Burke, bellowing with anger. "You've seen what happened to Valdez when he tried to hold out!"

George Green remarked: "He was what happened to Valdez. Take a fresh hold on yourself, Mister. Culver wouldn't know how to cheat. He's our luck, isn't he? Answer up, lads. Is he the luck of the *Spindrift*?"

They picked the question up and answered with a sudden heartiness, shouting: "Ay, ay! He's our luck! We'll stand by him."

"Let it stick that way, then," said Burke. "And be damned to the whole lot of you if it pans out wrong."

"There's a man up here that needs burial. Will you look to that, Burke?" asked Culver.

"Why not?" answered Burke. "I know the place in the book; and what's more, I've read it before."

He called out an order to the boatswain to get the body and prepare it for the sea.

Culver stepped aft to the dead man, the dog and Jimmy Jones.

He said: "Stay with him to the finish, Jimmy Jones. After that, come aft when you please. We'll try to make you at home there. If there's any way of doing it, I'll try always to give you a hand."

Jimmy Jones looked vaguely up at him, sighed and resumed his contemplation of the dead face.

"Here, Pico," called Culver. "Will you come with me, boy?"

The dog looked up, hesitated, then ran to Culver at the head of the companion-way and paused there, glancing back toward his dead master.

Culver lifted him bodily and put him down on the top step. There they sat listening to the rising noise of the wind as it sang in the rigging, and the sloshing of the waters down the side of the ship. Napico made vague, half-hearted efforts to escape from Culver from time to time, but surrendering at last to the pain of his wound, he laid his head out on Culver's

THE LUCK OF THE SPINDRIFT

knee and was quiet. And then, well forward, Culver heard the heavy splash and plumping sound for which he had been waiting. . . .

He stood up and went down into the cabin at once.

It was coming on toward sunset, and the cabin was a dull, rosy glow of light and trembling shadow. Young Wiley came to Culver from the open door of the little side cabin where Valdez kept his bunk.

He whispered: "She's in there, waiting for you. She's through with me. She loves you, Culver. Go in to talk to her."

He tried to step past, but Culver put out a hand and caught hold of him.

"Wait!" he whispered.

His understanding was trying to overtake the emotion that had broken over him like a combing wave. The white, set face of young Wiley was giving him meanings out of the future, but he could not decipher them any more than he would have been able to understand a radio code message.

Gradually he broke down the code, so to speak, and arrived at a meaning.

Is there not the poet who sings:

*Darkness walls in the soul; man is not seen
Save in the lightning flashes of his deeds.*

So the girl had seen him, by flashes, enacting great things, or things great in meaning to her. And so, perhaps, she had been blinded by actions.

The heart of Culver ached. It seemed to him that if all the pearls had been moons indeed, and heaped before him as treasures, the value would be less than that happiness which waited for him in the next cabin, almost in touching distance; and then he remembered his years, and her youth; and his will, long tempered by pain and abstinence, steadied. There should be some way of putting her from him forever. That would be the mercy and the kindness. He remembered that pride is our strongest passion.

Still holding Wiley's arm he turned to him a face of such suffering as that lad never seen before. But the voice with which he spoke was loud and ringing with a calm assurance.

"Stay here with the girl, Tommy," he commanded. "She's tired out. There's not much strength in her. She's soft in the body, and I'm afraid there's not much mind-stuff in her to rescue her in a pinch. Treat her like a sick child, however, and she'll gradually rally. . . . I

have other things to do, and can't waste time on her."

He had said it loudly. He saw a staggered comprehension in the face of Wiley, and then turned past him and went quickly out of the cabin, up the companion-way, to the fresh wind on the deck. The sun was already half beneath the rim, puffing out its upper cheeks; and in another moment it was gone. The brief tropical twilight lasted only a moment, and there was a sense of the horizon closing in, like falling walls.

He stood by the windward rail, watching the stars come out beyond the wavering bows of the *Spindrift*.

Someone came up behind him and stood quietly in the lee he made. That was Jimmy Jones.

Forward, he could hear the men singing and he felt a brief longing for the forecastle and a return to the first frightened days when the ship was new to him, even when he still was seeing it through the fog of his weakened eyes. They were no longer weak. He was seeing more clearly. It seemed to Culver that the sight he had gained was too clear, both within and without. . . . He thought of the girl below, of her shame, the closed eyes of her agony of shame, having heard him speak. He thought of Tommy Wiley sitting by like one in fear, but waiting in hope also. He prayed that he had done the only thing that was honorable. And he wished that honor could be a kinder feeling in the heart.

He had a sense of inevitable return, now, to the old days, and he could not be sure that he would be glad to enter them. The days that had housed him in a sort of innocent sufficiency then might not be ample enough for him since he had sailed on the *Spindrift* and become, as the sailors put it, her luck. He felt that the sea, in a sense, had claimed him; and the faces of his books were dim in his mind, like half-remembered friends.

SOMETHING cold and moist touched the palm of his hand; Napico was there, looking forward down the curving length of the ship. He did not brace himself amply for the heeling of the ship and the pressure of the wind, but leaned heavily against Culver. A dollop of flying spray came inboard and struck the dog, and he looked up with a faint whine to the face of his friend. It was not a very great sign—but Culver knew that he had become the second master.

THE END

Above The Convoy

A FEW lines from a dead man's letter might have put modern warfare's most effective defense weapon in the hands of the U. S. A. The letter was written by one Dave Closter, American in the British transport service, to his brother, radio-man in the U. S. Navy. It was not delivered for two months after it appears to have been written, and then only by a minor miracle. For Closter served on board the *White Prince* in that ill-starred convoy which, nearly a year ago now, was the first to feel the opening shock of all-out submarine-plus-airplane warfare in the Atlantic. Nine of seventeen ships—more than forty thousand tons—were sunk of that fated flotilla. Closter's body, with those of two other men, was picked up by a trawler off the Orkneys. The three still clung to the pneumatic raft upon which they had tried to escape from the burning *White Prince*, only to perish slowly from starvation and exposure.

Closter's water-soaked letter to his brother was found in a pocket. Slow but kindly officialdom saw that it was sent to America. There is some reason to believe that its contents may have been studied by the admiralty, although certainly neither the fact nor the letter were made public. Its tone would not have been good for British morale just then.

In part the letter read:

We didn't have a Chinaman's chance. Our pompons were as effective as spitting into a wind. Half a minute after the alarm was sounded the air was full of Stukas and the water full of tin fish. A



direct bomb-hit squirted one of our destroyers half way over the ocean. Believe me, kid, hell is a tea-party alongside this kind of war.

Nobody knows just how to fight off this kind of an attack. One of the officers just now was wishing we had a flotilla of carriers with about a thousand Spitfires or Hurricanes, but in my opinion the whole British navy and the R.A.F. couldn't stop these babies from sinking part of any convoy once they get near enough. And they do get near enough too quick. In case the air scouts miss them, we have to depend on electric ears and other gadgets whose range isn't enough. What we really need is something like that old treasure-bloop of ours—remember?—only stepped up to work at long distances. . . .

“Our treasure-bloop!” Back in their ‘teens on an Iowa farm, the Closter brothers had been bitten by the radio bug. Both were licensed “hams,” and together they had built their own apparatus, to the endless wonder of the community. During a period when “buried



A plastic plane, a submarine-detector, a mid-Atlantic base and a pilot keyed up to superhuman ability—these combine to give us a short novel of exceptional interest.

By **FULTON
T. GRANT**

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

treasure" was rumored to be hidden somewhere on a farmstead near by, the boys built what they called a "bloop" (named so chiefly for the sound of the spill-over of the oscillators in the ear-phones) to locate the rumored riches by methods quick and scientific. The bloop was much like the balances and oscillating finders used today by most prospectors, and its design was a popular form of entertainment among radio "hams" of the day.

When Trueman Closter got the letter,—due to the British Embassy's efforts,—his first feeling of grief and shock passed into that fatalistic submission which is typical of most seafaring men. Then

quickly came inspiration. It was that reference to the "bloop" which touched off the explosion in his brain. Dave, he told himself, might "have something there." If the old boyhood bloop could locate a chunk of metal fifty feet underground using a very simple pair of synchronized oscillating circuits, then why could not any substantial mass of metal be located virtually anywhere, given the power and the amplification?

And right there is the technical beginning of this history.

Radio-man Closter's invention became a fact sometime in March. Submitted to the technical and experimental division

of the Aéronautics Bureau in Washington, it aroused a certain skepticism on the part of the staff officers at first. When, however, British shipping losses had increased to such a point that the lost tonnage of that convoy of which the *White Prince* was a part became trivial by comparison, Closter's instrument became the subject of an important though secret conference in Washington.

MR. JAMES YANNESSEY, high official of the Navy Department, was speaking.

"Let us," he said, "face the facts squarely, gentlemen. On April 15 next the first important shipment under the new Aid-to-Britain bill will depart for England. Should that convoy, or any considerable part of it, be sunk, its effect upon popular opinion in this country would be—catastrophic."

Silence greeted this statement. The others knew only too well the truth of it.

"Admiral McCorkness has just now admitted that despite all this clamor about American convoys, there is no reason to believe that our Navy could succeed where the British Navy is failing. In short, gentlemen, this new type of sea-warfare depends upon surprise, which is to say that the Nazi operations combining sea or undersea and air attacks will inevitably sink a considerable portion of any convoy unless some means can be found by which an approaching attack is apprehended *before* it approaches the vulnerable flotilla of ships. In other words, the enemy must be engaged—and held—at a distance from the convoy and at a point where the precious cargoes cannot be involved—and risked. Is that not correct, Admiral?"

Old-school Admiral McCorkness snorted his assent.

"Damn' trouble is, anti-aircraft fire is ineffective! The Nazis count on that. We have to depend on scouting planes to pick up approaching enemy. Planes depend on visibility. We've got listening gadgets too, but their range is too damn' short. Once an attack gets under way around a convoy, the whole blasted American Navy couldn't stop 'em from sinking ships. That's why I say American convoys are not the answer, sir." He snorted again. "In fact, I don't see any good answer right now."

It was Captain Horatio Furrow of the Aéronautics Bureau who stood up to say:

"There may still be an answer, gentlemen. It was my duty—and I think my good fortune—to make a preliminary test

of a new instrument, the invention of an enlisted radio operator, which may solve that specific problem of time and distance."

McCorkness was dubious.

"Bah! Another gadget! The Navy doesn't lack for gadgets, Furrow."

"It has lacked, evidently, for this one, sir," said the technical man. "In my test of this device from a small scout plane, I was able to locate—and with considerable accuracy, too—a number of our own undersea craft operating in the coastal waters off New York and New Jersey. Also an army bomber flying at a high altitude over Camp Dix. It is just possible—"

"What range, Furrow? How far away?"

"Actually fifty miles seems to be the limit, but—"

"Bah! A modern plane flying at two hundred miles and more would eat up fifty miles in a few minutes. What we need is an hour's distance, Furrow, and there isn't a gadget in the world—"

"On the contrary, sir,"—the Captain was respectful but firm,—"I said my tests were preliminary. The only extant model of this instrument is a crude homemade experimental affair. Also the test was made from a metal plane—and metal, whether magnetic or not, must essentially limit the range of any device depending upon high-frequency emanations. Now in a non-metallic plane—"

ARE there such planes?" demanded one of the other men.

"In commercial use, yes. There are several planes made using plastic materials to replace metal. The Navy has made an effort to develop such a plane, hoping that by molding and casting large sections of a big plane, the bottleneck of machine-tooling might be taken out of production. Actually we possess three experimental planes made out of a new type of plastic known as *granitite*, for which many unusual advantages are claimed. These planes have already been delivered to the Coolidge Naval Air station. They are not yet in commission, however."

"You can't commission a plane overnight, Furrow. None of those experimental jobs have been Navy-tested yet. Takes time to test 'em, and more time to fit 'em for a flight. And you're only guessing about this—this gadget, whatever you call it."

"The inventor," said Furrow soberly, "calls it a bloop."



"The enemy must be engaged—and held—at a distance from the convoy."

"Bloop!" The Admiral bristled at the undignified name.

"Or supersonic synchro-balance, if you prefer that name, sir. It is quite true no adequate experiment with this instrument has yet been made. My claims for its final range under proper conditions are frankly hypothetical—theoretical, sir. And yet I feel quite sure that its range can be extended to upwards of three hundred miles if it is properly installed and skillfully flown. A plane can be commissioned at once. I shall accompany the test-pilot and make a second test of this—ah—*bloop*." This unlovely name brought another snort from McCorkness.

"And if the experiment justifies the plan, I shall ask for authorization to fly such a plane carrying the instrument as a liaison unit with the British patrols convoying that shipment of April 15. As I see it, gentlemen, it is our only step short of an actual declaration of war. A last resort, but perhaps a trump card."

The actual fact, if not the significance, of that experimental flight, are already history.... Commissioned and equipped with young Closter's "*bloop*," a Naval bomber—a plastic interpretation of the Navy's famous Consolidated PBY seaplane—was flown on a very special kind of a test. Captain Horatio Furrow himself was in the plane. A certain Commander Jelliffe, technical officer of the Coolidge post, who had shown a vivid in-

terest in the possibilities of the new invention, had been a member of the party.

The pilot was considered one of the Navy's greatest test-flyers, Lieutenant Gainsway, who had already distinguished himself in civil life as a test-flyer for one of the big air-lines. While it is unusual for passengers to be a part of the initial flight of any new plane, and the flight was admittedly hazardous for all concerned, the peculiar skill and intuitive abilities of this pilot were deemed sufficient to minimize all dangers.

UNFORTUNATELY, the plane crashed as it sought to land in the narrow man-made bay. Captain Furrow sustained painful though not specially serious injuries. The pilot escaped death at the expense of a few cracked ribs. Closter managed to escape with mere bruises, and to shield his precious *bloop* by embracing it and protecting it with his body. The plane itself was damaged to the extent of having one of its wings wrenched nearly off-at contact with the water. The only person to escape unharmed was Commander Jelliffe, and even he might have been drowned had not he taken the precaution of wearing a life-belt in the plane.

An investigation followed this crash. It was learned that the pilot, Lieutenant Gainsway, had been drinking in town on the eve of his flight. It was shown also that this flyer enjoyed a reputation for

having the greatest "capacity" among the post's personnel. It came out that while he *had* been, no doubt, a great flyer, gifted with reflexes and intuitive abilities counted rare and invaluable, he had been on the down-grade for some time now, and that only the indulgence of his squadron commander had prevented him from having long ago been disqualified as a pilot to test the Navy's new planes.

Somehow the newspapers ferreted out the story. Somehow they made a national scandal out of what might better have been treated as a matter for local discipline. From some source or other—the fount of information never was satisfactorily revealed to the Navy Department—the press learned something of the true purpose of the flight, and made it public. They dug into Gainsway's history as a civilian pilot for the Southways Lines of Firmingham, and they found that he had lost an enviable position as test-flyer for this big commercial outfit because he had broken the no-liquor rule of the line.

"*Does Navy discipline*," demanded one headline, "*wink at booze?*"

And the public, confused and worried and troubled by news of wars and strikes and bottlenecks and billions in national debt, groaned and wondered.

RONNY GAINSWAY sat in his tiny bachelor quarters, brooding. It was the third night of his confinement. A court-martial awaited him tomorrow or the next day, as soon as the court officers could be selected. In his heart was a great aching agony. He was not yet thirty years old, and here he was branded a drunkard. Dishonored. Disgraced.

Worse than the stigma of failure itself was another thing that troubled Ronny. It was true enough that he had been drinking on the eve of that flight. True enough that for some time now he had been drinking more than any man should drink. He had been sober enough in the morning, however, albeit he had suffered from a hang-over. He didn't minimize the stupidity of his fault, however. What puzzled him was the knowledge that something had gone wrong with that plane just as he had tried to bring her down on the water. The motors had quit on him. He had lost flying-speed at too low an altitude. He didn't understand it, but he knew it. He had fought the controls like a madman to keep from tearing the hull right off from the wings altogether and killing himself and those brass-hat passengers.

But when he tried to talk about this at the investigation, they wouldn't let him. They wouldn't listen.

"It is my duty to state that there was an undeniable odor of alcohol in the cockpit."

That was the testimony of Commander Jelliffe; and how they had pounced on it and magnified it and interpreted it and stretched it into a thousand meanings! They had not listened to him. They acted as though such testimony made his statements valueless. Not even Captain Furrow, whose life he had practically saved when the plane crashed, had offered a single word in the defense of the accused man.

And this was not the court-martial. That was still to come.

DEEPEST of all hurts too, was the thought of his "kid" sister. She was twenty-five, and a professional nurse in Firmingham, a young woman of character and stability. It was bad enough, thought Ronny, having to face his own stupidity and the disgrace of it, but what would it do to Phyl?

For Phyllis Gainsway, the sister in question, had been hero-worshiping at her adventure-seeking brother's shrine since childhood. It was the careless dollars that Ronny picked up in the old barn-storming days that had sent Phyllis to college with the intention of entering the medical profession. It was the lack of these dollars when he had vanished to aid a South American revolt against dictators that had forced her to forsake her career and become merely a nurse and not a doctor. It was his first successes in commercial aviation with Southways that had helped her build her great illusion of him and turn him into a shining hero in her mind. And it was his "trouble" with Southways that had shown her to be trusting and forgiving and understanding and sisterly. Always she had refused to admit his weaknesses and instability. She believed in him. She made him her knight of the air. She had encouraged him to enter the Naval air service after that Southways trouble, as a means of starting fresh with a clean slate. She had seen her hopes confirmed and her trust justified at first, for he had quickly earned a reputation of being an unusually fine flyer. When he was assigned to test-flying at Coolidge Station, she had been as happy as though it were her own success.

And now, with those scurrilous headlines, what would she think of her

brother? How would she take it, learning that he was a burned-out shell, a man of squandered abilities? What would Sis think? It made Ronny Gainsway sick to ponder on that!

Then at a late hour came an orderly summoning him to the Commandant's office. With the Old Man was the "brass hat," Captain Furrow of the Aéronautics Bureau, who had sustained injuries in the crash. On seeing him, Ronny feared the worst.

"It is my duty to inform you, Lieutenant," said the Old Man, "that Intelligence has made an investigation which exonerates you completely of any responsibility in that crash."

And while Ronny stood gaping, he explained:

Intelligence, always interested in the smash-up of a Navy plane, had discovered that the ignition wires had been severed close to the switch on the control-panel; and it had been established that—as Ronny himself knew so well—his motors must have died at a critical point in his landing maneuver. The breakage of those wires, said Intelligence, could be due only to one thing: sabotage.

"In a sense it has served a useful purpose," said the Commandant, "that the responsibility for this accident did at first seem to be yours. It serves, so to speak, as a red herring. Sabotage, Lieutenant, presupposes a *saboteur*, and in a naval station a *saboteur* is bound to be the agent of a foreign country. In this case we are sure of it. The agent's purpose was to destroy not only the plane but the only existing model of the instrument which was being tested in the plane. And likewise to make sure that another could not be built, since the inventor, Closter, would also be killed."

"But—my God, sir!" Ronny gasped.

"And now," the Old Man went on, "that blame for this crash has been officially fixed,—upon you, Lieutenant,—Intelligence feels that the agent may be reassured enough to make another try. With enough rope, he may hang himself."

WHILE Ron Gainsway was still suffering from shock, however comforting, the Commandant took up other matters which were less reassuring. Having been publicly shown to have conducted himself in a manner not becoming an officer and gentleman, he was officially reprimanded. He also would be regressed in numbers and deprived of certain privileges. He would not, however, face court-

martial; nor would he be held under arrest. The Commandant made it very plain that only the urgent pleas of Captain Furrow, who felt that due to Ronny's innate skill as a flyer the crash had been minimized, the precious detector instrument rescued and his own life probably spared, had saved the ill-advised young flyer from public disgrace. Furrow, it appeared, had a special demand upon the Lieutenant's services.

"That plane," Furrow said, "is now being recommissioned. On April fifteenth it will fly on a mission of the utmost importance, not only to the Navy but to the whole nation. Carrying this new detector instrument, by which approaching hostile craft may be located, it will insure the safe passage of a great flotilla of merchant ships carrying our first substantial armament shipment to Britain. I shall command the flight myself, Lieutenant. I shall require an able flyer as first pilot. I am hoping that you will volunteer for the work. I need not point out that the danger of the flight is considerable. The chances of our returning to base are—perhaps one in a thousand. Should you make your decision tonight, I ask you to report to my quarters before noon tomorrow."

And that was all.

LIEUTENANT GAINSWAY left the office of the Commandant in a daze, full of purpose, full of resolution. He had been a fool. He would be one no longer. He would show them! He would fly that plane to hell and back. He would report to Captain Furrow the first thing in the morning. . . .

Sadly enough, however, he could not make that report, for Captain Horatio Furrow perished in a catastrophe which struck Coolidge Station that night. The British Battle for the Atlantic came near to being lost then and there. And on that very same night, Lieutenant Ronald Gainsway ceased to be a discredited, unrespected worn-out old-man-of-twenty-eight, and turned overnight into a hero.

It began with his own sleeplessness. Outside, it was raining, drizzling, misting heavily as an ocean wind blew in a thick spume.

Ronny had sat awhile in the friendly darkness of his room taking inventory of himself, balancing the books of his own corporate being—and ruefully contemplating the deficit. A letter from his sister Phyllis, in Firmingham, had added to his humility. She wrote:



He couldn't let the flames consume that man who only yesterday had shown such faith in him.

"I can't believe it, Ron. You're bigger than that—more of a man. I won't let myself believe those stories. I'm going to pretend they were never published. I'm praying that there is some terrible mistake, Ron, and I'm waiting for you to tell me just what it is that is wrong."

"What a girl!" he was thinking. "And what an ungrateful lout I've let myself grow into. Thank God I can tell her now, anyhow. I'll show her. And I'll show Furrow, too."

IT was midnight when, unable to dismiss his own shortcomings from his mind, and still remembering what the Commandant had said of his accident, he decided to brave the weather and visit the hangar where, no doubt, an all-night crew of mechanics would be busily trying to get the injured plane into commission. He skirted the sea-wall, got himself challenged by a Marine sentry who identified

him and passed him on, and finally turned into a narrow path between hedges which had access to the test-field and the more remote hangars.

He noted with some surprise that the sentry who was usually to be found at the gate was not around, but decided that he must just have relieved the eight-to-twelve watch and would probably be inspecting the other end of his post before taking the night's responsibility. The rain had nearly ceased, but the mist was still thick, and so it was without any warning at all that he heard a step directly in front of him and all but bumped into a figure wearing a raincoat and the cap of a Naval officer.

"Sorry," said Ronny. "Sticky night, sir."

But the man into whom he had nearly run headlong did not deign to reply.

That annoyed Lieutenant Gainsway, who was given to talkativeness, to easy and friendly chatter. And so with a

muffled growl of indignation, he turned around to watch the retreating figure.

"I'll be totally damned!" he said to himself. "Why, that—that lousy stuffed shirt—"

For at that instant a break in the mist let through the faint glimmer of a moon reflected against the near-by water, and the silent passer-by's head was silhouetted against the brighter patch. And recognition, or something like it, came sharply to Ronny Gainsway.

"Jelliffe! What in blazes was he doing out here?"

He could be mistaken, of course. It is far from easy to recognize a man in a slicker on a dark sticky night. But he was satisfied that the figure who had bumped him in the dark and had refused to greet him in common courtesy, was no other than Commander Jelliffe, lucky member of the group who had taken the experimental flight in that plastic plane. Commander Jelliffe, who had gratuitously testified as to the "odor" in the cockpit. Certainly the silhouette of this Commander Jelliffe was not one that he, Ronny Gainsway, would be likely to forget. What puzzled him was that *if* indeed it were Jelliffe, what would a man of Jelliffe's rank be doing near the hangars of the test-field on a rainy midnight? And why should he refuse to acknowledge a polite word of regret for nearly having knocked a man down?

"Maybe," decided Ronny, "he can't help being what he is, the son of a Jelliffe-fish!" And so he let it go at that.

THREE was a light visible at the rear of the hangar, apparently in one of the tool-rooms where delicate instruments are kept and issued as required. But Ronny was mildly surprised at not hearing the sound of tapping hammers, polishing-motors whining, engines roaring as mechanics tuned them. He had thought to find life in the hangar—not a full crew, perhaps, but at least a few specialists to speed the reconditioning of the plane. Under the new intensified program of the Navy few things ever had a moment of complete idleness.

He approached the hangar from the water side toward the great airplane door. Cut into this master door were lesser portals that operated by feather-touch balances. He gripped the lift-bar of the first small door, and to his surprise found it fastened or jammed.

He tried the next. It too was immobile. At the third door he had already

clasped the handle when he stopped and sniffed the air. He smelled smoke.

"Wood-smoke too, it smells like," he mused. "Now, I wonder if—"

He grasped the handle and tugged at the door. At that instant, as he bent down, something struck him heavily on the back of his head and he slipped unconscious to the ground.

WHEN Ronny recovered consciousness, the odor of smoke was stronger in his nostrils, and he observed, to his astonishment, that he was no longer outside the door to the hangar, but was *inside* now. Not only that, but the hangar itself was full of smoke. Electric lights still burned, but he could perceive no men working on the great shiny gray plane that stood there so massive and monster-like. And while he groggily got to his feet, there came to him a cracking sound and the crash of a timber, and suddenly a portion of the wooden wall to the tool-shop tumbled inward at him, letting a shower of sparks and flame into the main portion of the hangar.

Ronny shouted wildly. There was no answer from inside, and he knew no voice could penetrate those walls. frantic now, he found a fire-extinguisher where it was habitually stowed in a movable wall-panel, and attacked the flames with its chemical stream. As he worked, it struck him again that this was all fantastically irregular. Where was everybody? How could a fire break out with no alarm being given? What was wrong?

Then he saw his answer—or partial answer. Prone on the cement floor under the truck upon which the hull of the giant plane was rolled to the water, lay a limp uniformed figure with the gold stripes of a captain embroidered on his sleeves. Ronny dashed toward the motionless man only to see, as he got close to the plane, the feet of another man—this one in dungarees—dangling limply from the open door that led into the main cabin of the plane.

Both of these men, apparently, were dead.

But even his realization of this shocked him less than the identity of the four-striper whose graying head lay in a welter of darkening blood.

For that man, stricken down by a crushing blow on the head, was Captain Horatio Furrow of the Bureau of Aeronautics.

"God!" said Ronny as he stared into the dead man's face. "God Almighty!"

But the other figure dangling from the plane was not dead. This grease-smeared and limp young man clutched two long wires in one hand, and a small electric soldering-iron in the other. The iron was still hot, and was still attached to a long plug-in cord that extended to the hangar wall.

And Ronny recognized this man too. It was the inventive young radio operator, Trueman Closter.

There was plainly no chance to stop those flames now. If he waited more than another minute, he would be trapped in that stifling furnace himself. Presently the temperature would expand the gas in the seaplane's tanks. And when that happened— He shivered at the picture.

He worked like mad, now. Seizing Closter first, he dragged him to one of the hangar doors that had been so stubborn from the outside. The reason was plain. A strip of plank had been jammed hard and fast into the slideway. Ronny kicked it out, threw the door up until the sudden suction of air sent new life into the flames inside and the roaring sound began. He got Closter through and went back for Furrow's body. He couldn't let the flames consume that man who only yesterday had shown such faith in him. Showers of sparks greeted him; sprays of ignited oil from an open grease-bucket spat at him.

"Any minute now," he heard in his ears as though he were actually speaking. "Any minute now—"

But he got hold of the dead Captain, and half carrying, half dragging the inert body, he struggled to the door. His eyes were all but useless from smoke. His lungs felt like scalded meat. His very flesh seemed seared and aching. But he made it. He got himself and his burden through the door and across the runway to the cool grass where Closter still lay outstretched. He got there just as the siren of the emergency wagon split the air. That was all. He could give up then, and he did—he fainted.

THE headline, or others much like it, that filled the papers next day, read:

NOTED NAVY MAN DEAD IN FLAMES AS FIRE GUTS COOLIDGE HANGAR: ACCUSED FLYER IN HEROIC RESCUE

Fame or blame, it seems is all "news" for the press. Only yesterday had they ridiculed and treated Ronald Gainsway to such titles as "tippling pilot," and

had criticized discipline at the Coolidge Naval Air Station. Now they inflated him, built him into a hero, made him a celebrity and—ridiculously, it seemed—glossed over his supposed trespasses while they shouted his praises, blatantly saying: "Of such men is our Navy made."

It made Ronny sick. What did they know? What did they care for the truth? Why should they make such a display of rhetoric over so simple a thing? Any man would pull another out of a fire—if he could, and was lucky. All this stuff made him just a little nauseated. Besides, why didn't they tell all of it? Why did they let it be believed that Captain Furrow's death was due to the fire—that Closter had been overcome by fumes? Why didn't they let people know what had really happened?

He was to discover part of the answer to those queries that very morning.

A SOMBER-FACED Intelligence officer visited Ronny in the hospital where he had been held for supervision. He asked the Lieutenant to repeat the story he had tried to tell the previous night after recovering from his faint. He listened with great attention. Then:

"You are certain, then, that this blow from behind must have been struck by some human agency? You could not have struck against something—say, the handle-bar of iron that is fixed to the outside of that door?"

"Look at my head and see where I got hit, sir, and then tell me how I could hit the back of my head on that bar when I had my *hands* on it. No, that was a crack from a piece of pipe or a blackjack of some kind. I've seen plenty of that kind of stuff, in crawling around bars. Besides, the Captain—"

"The Captain might have struck his head against any one of many projecting objects."

"Sure he might. And so might Closter and that poor devil of a mechanic they found burned to a crisp in the tool-room. But wouldn't you say that was a queer lot of tough luck, sir? Three men getting their heads beat in, and one of them—at least one—getting hit so hard he died of it? What does Closter say, sir?"

The Intelligence officer did not answer directly.

"We understand that you were to be first pilot on Furrow's projected flight—April fifteenth. Is that correct?"

"Why—why, sure; only I hadn't exactly told him yet."

ABOVE THE CONVOY

"And you know the purpose of that flight?"

"Sure: that instrument, that gadget—"

"Closter's synchro-balance detector? Exactly. And it is only the purest luck that that instrument was not destroyed in the hangar, Lieutenant."

"You mean—sabotage? Say, that makes twice. I—"

"So it appears. We had hoped to prevent the second attempt, Lieutenant. We had hoped that by letting it appear that blame was fixed upon you for the last accident in which that device was nearly lost, we might make the *saboteur* so sure of himself that he would show his hand. Obviously it didn't work out that way. Captain Furrow, and Closter, had come into the hangar together. It was Closter's idea, we understand. He had worked out a rather special type of shielding for the motors of that plane, so that there might be no interference to hamper the effectiveness of his instrument. He had wanted to demonstrate this development for Furrow, and the Captain had gone with him to the plane. Luckily the instrument itself was locked safely in a vault. We have been taking no chances, Lieutenant."

NOW the Intelligence man came to his point:

"There is one request I should like to make of you, Lieutenant: As we have studied the work of this agent, we have begun to entertain suspicions—only suspicions, mind you, of a definite nature. We can't just at present confirm those suspicions; nor can we accuse anybody. The charge of espionage and treason is a serious thing, Lieutenant, and not lightly to be made. Furthermore, we have reason to believe that we are confronted by a man of remarkable resources and brilliance. He will be sure to make one more effort to destroy or render useless this radio detector of Closter's—before the fifteenth. And that is where you may, if you will, be of service to us—to your country, perhaps."

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"Captain Furrow's death does not, of course, eliminate the experiment of April fifteenth. If by using that instrument we are able to help the British defend that convoy, we may have effected a real turning-point in this war. And therefore that expedition will be flown. Commander Jelliffe will be in charge of that plane—he has already offered his services. In addition to the commander-navigator,

two pilots will be needed. Lieutenant Serviss of your own squadron has been selected as one. We ask you to follow Captain Furrow's wishes, and to fly as the other pilot, Lieutenant."

Ronny did not give any direct answer to that. In his mind was one word, the name Jelliffe. He spoke the name before he was well aware that he said it.

"Jelliffe!" he said. There was something more than surprise in his tone. The Intelligence man responded:

"Yes. Do you object to serving under Commander Jelliffe? I recall that he did offer testimony against your—ah—manner of relaxation, during the investigation of that crash. But—"

"Oh, no," said Ronny quickly. "Hell, no, sir. I don't mind. I'd like nothing better. Believe me, sir, I'll be glad to fly that plane—with Commander Jelliffe."

And after studying this young man for an instant narrowly, the Intelligence officer said a very odd thing:

"Oh—by the way, Lieutenant," he said, "is there—ah—any further information—anything at all—that you have not reported to Intelligence? Are you quite sure?"

"Huh?" said Ronny. "Sure I'm sure. What would I be holding out?"

"Ah," said the officer. "Nothing, of course. Well, that is all. It is settled, then, that you will participate in that flight of the fifteenth? Right. And remember, Lieutenant—"

He took a low confidential tone.

"Remember that the first pilot's job is one of responsibility—great responsibility. In this case, and knowing what I have told you—about the sabotage element—it may require alertness and intelligence beyond that of an ordinary flyer. The safety of this mission and its all-important success may depend upon your vigilance—"

"Mine? But after all, I'm only a pilot. I won't be in command of that ship, sir. Commander Jelliffe, you say, will—"

"Will act, I am sure, according to the dictates of his own information, intelligence and—ah—conscience."

And the interview ended on that note.

BEING a one-day hero has certain advantages. Not the least of these, so far as concerned Lieutenant Gainsway, was the tendency of everyone, both his superiors and fellow-officers, to forget the unpleasant charges which only yesterday had been heaped upon his name and to remember only his services at the hangar

fire. Thus he got a little of his self-esteem back. He had fewer misgivings concerning his future and less self-reproach concerning that lovely hero-worshiping sister back home in Birmingham. The sister, in fact, sent Ronny a wire which was typical of her:

Don't let it go to your head. Phyl.

The result of which was that he asked for—and received—permission for a brief leave of absence in view of the important mission of the fifteenth, and that he hurried to pay a visit to this sister whose opinion of him he cherished.

It was on his way to the train, however, that he happened to run into Commander Jelliffe. This time the officer was entirely cordial.

"Let me add my own applause to the rest, Lieutenant. That was a lucky and a plucky business at the fire. And by the way, I'm glad to have you with us on the fifteenth."

Ronny disliked this man instinctively, though he could not have told exactly why, and could not resist a remark by which he conveyed to the Commander that he thought he had seen him near the hangar just before that fire. The superior officer opened his eyes widely.

"Mistaken identity, of course," he said. "Quite odd, eh? Matter of fact, I had dinner with Captain Furrow, and he drove me home about nine o'clock. Never would have supposed when I left him that he'd be dead before morning. Ghastly kind of thing, trapped like that!"

On the train Ronny reflected upon this reply. Was it possible the Intelligence officer had meant anything by that odd remark of his: "Do you object to serving under Commander Jelliffe?"

PERHAPS it was general fatigue, perhaps it was nervous concern that caused Ronny's brief relaxation of watchfulness over himself. Explain it as you will, it happened.

The train reached Birmingham toward noon. Fortune's whim had arranged it so that an old time co-pilot who had known Ronny in the good old Southways days should be passing through the station just then. They met; they greeted joyously. Without thinking of the danger, Ronny let himself be led to the station's bar, where a small libation to renewed old friendships was in order. Memories flowed swiftly. Old times, old scenes were conjured up. More libations followed all too easily. And before Ronny

himself was aware of it, the hands of the clock were pointing to five o'clock in the afternoon, and he himself was pointing to other more populous bars.

Close tight the curtain on that evening. The phenomenon is not a rare one.

IN the morning Ronny Gainsway awoke in a Turkish bath, alone, almost penniless and in the depths of despair.

"God!" he breathed in disgusted misery. "What a mess! What a stupid, incredible mess! What can I say to Phyl?"

That was the worst of it.

He had wired his sister of his visit. She would be waiting for him—had been waiting for him since the arrival of his train.

As he lay there, the panorama of his life came before him: It was a life of almos. It was a life of just missing. Of near-greatness and failures. Of high expectations and brutally dashed hopes. It was a life, in brief, of a boy who refused to be a man.

He mused:

"And now the Navy is giving me my last chance. Everybody gives me a chance, it looks like, and I always muff it. The Navy is giving me a chance to do one real thing and to prove that I'm the kind of a flyer—and man—that I'm cracked up to be. If I fly on the fifteenth—and by God, I will—I've got to be all man, a real man. More than that, I've got to be just a little better than all man. They're all going to depend on me. They're all my responsibility."

He couldn't get away from that.

"Really it's a job for a super-man, and all I am is a boozy washed-up has-been. I'm likely to crack. I'm supposed to be a man, and I'm not even a decent mouse. I've got to do something about it."

He left the Turkish bath, but he could not bring himself to face his sister. He roamed the streets of Birmingham like a lost sheep, casting about for some straw of help in this weakness of his, some straw which he could not find. And then, with a sudden flash, came the inspiration. It came out of the suggestion of a word, a mere phrase.

"Here I am," began the phrase, "due to handle a situation that needs more than just plain human sense and ability, and here I am just a washed-up slob that ought not to be flying even a kite. If a fellow could only get himself keyed up somehow—"

That was it; if he could only get himself keyed up!



"Some little maybe this
will hurt, boy."

The concept struck a responsive chord in his memory, brought back the hazy recollection of something he knew, something that concerned his sister. What was it? Something about keying-up people, some kind of miracle-man. . . .

And then it came to him: Medlow—Dr. Medlow.

Several years earlier, when his sister had abandoned her idea of studying for a medical degree, she had been in the employ of a foreign doctor by that name. The man was a student of the then-little-known science of the endocrine glands, and had perfected a technique—or was it some dope?—whereby the human glands could be stimulated to a point where the entire functioning body and mind and spirit were speeded up to a more-than-human level.

Trouble had overtaken Phyllis' employer, however. When an operation performed on an infant resulted in the child's death, the medical profession cast him out. He was tried on charges of manslaughter, was convicted, imprisoned. He was branded a quack, and his technique—or whatever—was scorned and discredited by organized medicine.

But Phyllis Gainsway had been true to her defend-the-underdog credo. She'd refused to lose faith in the persecuted

scientist; he had convinced her that he was a blessed benefactor of mankind rather than the charlatan and impostor his fellow-men proclaimed him. She was loyal. Although he had lost his practice and was reduced to puttering and experimenting in an old loft instead of his immaculate and well-equipped laboratory, she visited him, helped him, defended him.

Many times when Ronny came home for one of his rare visits, had he heard his sister lamenting the fate of her beloved Dr. Medlow.

"I don't care what *they* think of him," she would say. "He's the greatest scientist alive today—perhaps the greatest of all time. They've called him a monster-maker, but really he has found the secret of rebuilding people, making them greater, stronger, smarter, happier. He could regenerate the whole human race with his formula, if they'd only listen to him. And besides, he's a lovable, wonderful old man, and I'd do anything for him—anything!"

RONNY recalled that now with sudden elation. If any member of the human race needed rebuilding, he did!

"Maybe that old doc's stuff is just the ticket for me," was the general trend of his thinking. "Maybe with his help I could be smart enough and strong enough

—and big enough—to handle myself and this whole situation. So he steps up all a man's powers, does he? Well, he can go to work on mine. All by myself I don't have what it takes—no matter what Sis thinks. I've proved that plenty now. And it's going to need what it takes to fly that plane and keep some lousy spy from wrecking it. It's up to me—nobody but me. Jack Serviss is a good lad and a pretty fair pilot, but he's too small-time for this job. I'm too small-time without help. Anybody is. It's going to take something smarter and better and a whole lot more intelligent than a good run-of-the-mill pilot. It's going to take something—well, maybe a little more than human. Maybe Medlow can do it. He must really have something, or Sis would never believe in him that way. I'm going to see him."

Dr. EMIL MEDLOW—"doctor"—only by courtesy and the pathetic gratitude of a few poor devils in the slums of Birmingham who were appreciative of the help and marvelous cures wrought for them by this outcast physician—was a man who had suffered much but still persevered. Even Ronny Gainsway could see that in his face. It was a thin, emaciated face behind the triangular beard. It was lined with disappointment and bitterness.

"So? Then you are the brother," was his first comment. "Then you are this brother who is never growing up, who cannot understand what it is in this life to be what they call responsible? She is so many times telling me of you. She is to me a good friend, this sister of you. Without her I think sometimes I cannot make my work. She is loving you much. When I listen, I do not sometimes think you are worth so much of her."

"You've got that much straight, Doctor," Ronny admitted. "I've let her down. The meanest thing a man can do is to let down somebody who wants to believe in him. I've been doing that all my life. I've made a mess of it, and I want to fix it, somehow. That's why I dug you up and came here. Sis has told me about you. If she believes in you, I'll bet you've got what she says you've got. I don't have much money, but I'll give you all I have. I need to have somebody make a man out of me. More than a man. I can't tell you the whole thing, because it's sort of a military secret, but it could be that practically everything depends on what I do and how I handle a job I've got to take on the fifteenth. That's why I'm

here. It isn't only for Phyl. It's for the Navy, for the country—maybe for all of civilization. I've got to be so good that I can't make a mistake. I've got to have judgment that can't be wrong. I've got to be able to fly a plane that might shake apart any minute. I've got to fly that plane as long as there is a piece of wing left. In other words, Doctor, I've got to be something that never was. And from what my sister has told me of you, I had a hunch you could fix it."

"But your sister, then she does not know?"

"No. After the way I let her down this time, I wouldn't dare face her. Besides, she probably wouldn't let me come here. You know how it is. But I have a hunch this may be the last job of duty I'll ever live to get, and I'd like to make it something she'll be glad to remember. I owe it to her, Doctor. I've been a weakling and a mess and a flop. Sis just won't admit what kind of flop I've been. I'd like to go out of this mess leaving her to believe she was right about me all the time. And I believe you could do that for me. She believes in you, and that's enough for me."

FOR some minutes the little doctor studied the young man in silence. Then: "Yes.... Yes. Much I can do if I am willing. But also there is much I cannot yet do. See? Here in these little tubes is the liquid which is my formula K-11. With it I am stimulating the action of the glands so that the body, the brain, is going so strong like it is not possible for other people. That is well, young man, but there is also the danger."

"I'm not especially afraid, Doctor."

"So? Then this is because you are so ignorant of what it is that you should fear. Always there is fear. What we call it to be brave, it is only lacking the imagination to make pictures of what we should fear. But I say to you there is danger. By the glands I am controlling what you call it the nature. Such nature, I mean, which you can see. There is also more nature which I am not controlling. Such nature I mean which is in the subconscious, which may be sublimate now, which is what we call it *inhibit*—by some veneer of civilization. Sometimes this is good, sometimes bad. If it is bad in you, then maybe I am making you like a monster. That is one danger."

"I'll take a chance on that, Doc. So far as I know, all my inhibitions have

been pretty well displayed while I was trying to prove that liquor doesn't affect me. They were pretty stupid, I guess, but they couldn't be called exactly criminal."

"But this is not all the danger; no. I can make you accelerated so in some years you are the genius, the great man, the thing which they are calling success. In some years, young man. But now you come asking that I do this for already the fifteenth, no? Then it is different. Such strong injection of this formula you must be taking, it will burn you out. It is not possible that the body, the brain, are functioning in a few days what they could function in some years—unless there is danger of burning them out."

"How long does it take to burn a man out?"

The old physician lifted his shoulders.

"I am not knowing that," he said. "It is maybe some days, some hours—I do not know. Some hours will you flare bright like a wick; but when the oil is gone, then you will smoke and burn but give no light. It is maybe too short, the time. You do not like to take this chance?"

Ronny said, very seriously:

"Doctor, you've got me wrong. I'll take that chance. I'll take any chance. It doesn't matter what happens to me. If I have to burn out in order to save something—something bigger than you and me and anybody—then I'll burn, and like it. I'm a flyer, Doctor. In my game you get pretty used to taking chances. It isn't for nothing that life-insurance for flyers comes high. But if you can give me a few white-hot hours, Doctor—you'll be doing something that will make all your work worth while. That sister of mine believes in you. I'll ask her to come here, and I'll just bet she will agree with me. What do you say, Doctor?"

TO say that Ronny Gainsway became aware of change in himself would be to trespass upon regions of human consciousness which may not be penetrated nor understood. And yet there was a change—a change, even in point of view. And in spite of the unusual precautions taken concerning the flight—the isolation of the officers and crew in a wooden barracks near the seawall and within sight of the big flying-boat as she lay out there ready for her take-off—Ronny found himself contemplating the morning's flight objectively. It was no longer a pretty dream of flight into heaven's lower re-

gions. It was no longer a boy's bright bird-man illusion.

He saw himself now not as a flyer, a pilot guiding a big craft through the air and holding her on a carefully plotted course, but rather as an observer, an investigator, a sentry in the defense of a tremendously important project. And this indeed was a change. There probably were others more fundamental, of which he could not be aware.

IN the sheltered narrows the plane lay, like a great translucent bird floating on the water. She had been run out of her hangar late in the afternoon. Mechanics swarmed over her in the final check-up. She was fueled to the full extent of her great flying range. She could, if need be, fly the Atlantic non-stop. The translucent plastic stuff which built her hull and wings gave her an unreal appearance and revealed in shadowy outline every spar, every strut. But delicate as the pearly gray stuff made her seem, she was massive, sturdy, and beautiful.

"Now, damned if she don't look hot," said one mechanic. "An' tough, too! If that damn' plastic stuff has the guts to take it, up there, she'll fly right into the moon!"

"But keep your fingers crossed, Jack," responded another. "They's a helluva lot o' ways a feller can commit suicide without he flies off in a celluloid collar."

The big ship took off smoothly, without mishap—a little heavily, perhaps, but strongly. And long before the first tense hour was over and the great seaplane was far out over the ocean, the tension was abating, the hazard of an untried plane was receding in the minds of officers and crew. There was no thought at all of trouble. No thought, that is to say, except in the newly illuminated mind of Lieutenant Gainsway, first pilot.

One specific manifestation of the new state of things in Ronny's mind concerned Commander Jelliffe. Heretofore he had been the victim of doubts concerning the arrogant and martinet-like officer who was self-elected to command this flight. Now there were no more doubts. He knew. Jelliffe, he knew, was an imposter. If he did not, in his thinking, use the word *spy* or *traitor*, it was because even an accelerated brain-process, no doubt, requires material evidences before specific conclusions can be arrived at. In Ronny's own words, however: "This Jelliffe number is a phony. I can't prove it but I know it."



That metal box, that
"bloop," was the soul of
this plane.

Not, of course, that he could find fault with the man's ability as officer or navigator. Jelliffe had handled officers and crew of the newly commissioned ship with competence and intelligence. He had plotted their course ably, and had chatted with his two pilots informally about the flight, quite like any other officer before any other projected duty.

Nevertheless and notwithstanding, Jelliffe was wrong—somehow.

THEY were flying just under two hundred miles an hour. Jelliffe had calculated that they would reach the rendezvous in mid-ocean just before dark. They would get specific instructions then. Probably they would try to refuel, in the event that their orders carried them over considerable distance. The Commander discussed the difficulties of refueling at sea, issued careful and specific instructions to the men, gave each a responsibility, in general behaved like any good of-

ficer in the realization of a difficult and dangerous mission.

And yet no doubt as to the man's treachery was in Ronny's mind. His own sureness puzzled him. At moments he seemed to be two separate intelligences under one troubled skin.

But of such complexities he had no time to think now. He was busy. He was, after all, the chief pilot on a big Navy bomber off on a cruise. His duties were many. And heavier than his duties was that lingering knowledge within, that he alone of all the officers and men on that flying-boat *knew* for a certainty that one man among them was plotting the destruction of all.

An hour, two hours passed, and there had not been a movement, not even a look from Jelliffe which could inspire any suspicion. The man had made frequent tours of inspection over the big plane, had checked this and inquired about that, had paid close attention to the weather

as got by young Closter over the radio. And when, after spending a quarter of an hour or so in the cockpit with Lieutenant Serviss, who had taken over for Ronny, there was nothing at all extraordinary when he said:

"All right, Serviss. Keep her on Iron Mike if you like, but hold just that course. I'll go aft and look around. Mustn't forget this plastic stuff is new. I'm on the lookout for a strut-failure or a cracked rivet or anything like that. Call me if you sight anything that looks wrong."

NOTHING extraordinary at all, in this—except to Ronny Gainsway. It was just as though a strong, sure voice inside him had said:

"That's all wrong. Strut-failure! The first sign of failure would be in the wing-spars, anyhow. What's he really going to do back there?"

And so Ronny followed Jelliffe. . . .

The passage from the main cabin aft to the narrower portions of the fuselage was through a sturdy bulkhead, the frame of which was virtually a powerful rib or stringer in the hull's skeleton. Beyond the Number One bulkhead, the cigar-shape of the fuselage diminished toward the tail. A sort of compartment was formed, walled by the moulded ribs and reinforcements, which in a metal ship would be riveted steel spars and cantilevers or stringers. Yet the tough *granite* material, although softly translucent, gave a feeling of great strength, while it let in a faint glow of outer sunlight.

Carefully slipping through the door and closing it as quietly as possible, Ronny failed to see any sign of Jelliffe. The rear compartment was chiefly used for storage. One had to crouch in it, rather than stand upright. A large reserve gas-tank had been built in especially for this flight, leaving very little passage for humans. There was no floor nor deck save a two-foot catwalk that protected the keelson and hull underneath. Boxes of supplies were wedged here and there tightly to prevent sliding. A coil of rope, unused and bright yellow, lay beyond the tank.

But—no sign of Jelliffe.

Then, as his eyes grew adjusted to the queer light, Gainsway was suddenly and sharply conscious that he was not alone. Just as suddenly there was a strong pressure at his side, and a voice said:

"Don't move, Gainsway. Don't be a boy scout."

It was Jelliffe's voice. And Jelliffe loomed in the twilight, crouching beside him.

Just what the former Ronald Gainsway might have done then is a moot question. Something reckless—and foolish—no doubt. But the renewed Gainsway did nothing at all. He stood stiff. He saw the glint of the big automatic in the man's hand, and he merely said:

"Jelliffe! I rather thought I'd find something like this."

The man's voice was a sneer.

"Indeed? You astonish me, Gainsway. I had not thought you quite so penetrating. However, no matter now. Let me introduce myself. The name is Baron Franz Siegfried von Jelif, Colonel-Commandant in the second German air army. Keep your hands high, Gainsway. It won't be long now, for either of us."

Ronny silently lifted his hands.

Jelliffe—or Jelif—backed away along the hull, in one hand the automatic, in the other what seemed to be a coil of white rope. But it was not, as Ronny saw instantly, rope at all. It was a fuse. And the fuse led to a point between two stringers of the hull to where a gray iron cylinder was wedged. Ronny understood.

Jelif's voice had a fanatic quality as he said: "If you believe in prayer, Gainsway, choose a short one. Time allowed is exactly sixty seconds. It will be quite a spectacular thing, watching a big ship come apart in the air."

RONNY was conscious of perspiration on his brow. A drop trickled down his face. Jelif, he saw, had donned some sort of loose gray garment that hung about him in big folds, and at his back was a little canvas box that could only be a 'chute pack. Jelif may have seen his eyes, for he said:

"Naturally I'm leaving you. Fortunately the weather is good below and the water calm. By the time my 'chute opens I will be a human pontoon, Gainsway. This suit is a new development. It inflates with air as the body falls. I can float and send up signal rockets until my friends come to pick me up."

Ronny's fingers touched an overhead spar whose flanges were meant to give added strength and rigidity to the ship.

"Just how are you going to get out, Jelif?" he said, although already he knew the answer and was stalling only for time.

The man lighted a windproof match as casually as though he were about to touch it to a cigarette instead of the fuse.

He shrugged and pointed to the emergency door, from which the hand-screws already hung loose, unscrewed in advance. His eyes narrowed suddenly: "Don't make a fool play, Gainsway. I couldn't miss you at this distance."

He stepped forward and reached at the emergency door in the side of the ship, a door seldom used save for loading heavy packages, and invariably fastened strongly into its massive frame. A touch of his hand swung it open inward. The sudden rush of air made the ship lurch as the balance of pressure against her changed.

Then Jelif lighted the fuse. He held it musingly in his fingers as sparks shot from the white snake-like thing.

"I had planned to tie you, Gainsway, but I fear I must shoot you anyhow. I doubt if you could cut this fuse, since it is wound with thin steel wire, but I must take no chances. Do you prefer a knee? Or would you rather get it over with quickly? Believe me, I'm quite a good shot. You can trust me to—" He never did finish his swaggering sentence. At that instant the ship hit a small air-pocket and lurched perceptibly. The pistol wavered just a fraction. Ronny hurled both his feet into the man's face, using his fingers on the overhead strut as leverage. It was a terrific kick. He felt the awful crunch of it under his feet. He saw the man fall backward, his head striking violently against the hard frame of the open door. He saw the body ricochet from the frame and fall diagonally out into space. He saw the fierce wind-current whip the man like a flying leaf. In that split second that is required for a falling body to fulfill its parabolic destiny, he saw the German's suit fill with wind and balloon out sickeningly.

But he did not see the parachute blossom. Jelif had been unconscious when he fell. He would not pull his rip-cord.

RONNY plunged headlong to the point where the bomb was hidden in the structure. But it had been wedged tight, and he could not budge it. The close air of the compartment was filling with acrid fumes. The fuse was sizzling, spluttering, traveling madly. Ronny carried a knife. He began working on the thin white fuse just where it approached the bomb. It seemed soft enough. His blade cut into it—and snapped on hard-tempered steel wires.

Frantically he opened another blade. The sizzling serpent twisted in his hands.

The burning spot whirled at him. It required a superhuman effort to maintain enough calm to cut carefully, letting the blade slide between the close-wound steel wires that reinforced the fuse. The sizzle was barely two feet from his hand, and still the wires held toughly. One foot. . . . Eight inches. . . . He had the blade through the fuse, but the steel wires held tightly. The flames would easily leap the tiny gap. Six inches. . . . Four inches. He bent the wires back and forth rapidly, praying madly that the heat of friction would snap them. Three inches—

And then it snapped.

Ronny flung the short bit of flaming stuff at the still open door and saw it whipped away by the wind.

IT was decided between Lieutenants Gainsway and Serviss that it would be unwise to inform the other men as to what had become of the Commander. How could they explain what they scarcely could understand themselves? Why cast deeper shadows upon the already tense and worried men? For already a "cold front" which had previously been reported as moving slowly, had somehow picked up speed and had veered straight into their path. There would be weather. And weather in an untried ship may be another name for disaster.

And so the door to the Commander's cabin was closed and locked, and it was announced that during Jelliffe's indisposition, Lieutenant Gainsway would take command.

Presently two things happened: Closter picked up a radio signal that left no doubt as to its origin. The flotilla of merchant ships was close to them. Their rendezvous at last!

The second thing was a storm.

The tempest broke suddenly and viciously. They had been flying low, the more quickly to pick up the British ships, but now they were forced to climb. Ronny took over and slid the big ship up at two thousand feet a minute as steeply as he dared, while Closter worked his transmitter frantically in an effort to locate the convoy. As Gainsway gripped the wheel, a strange sensation which did not rightly belong to flying came into his hands and arms. He tensed. He held his breath. Then he turned to Serviss.

"Vibration. Not bad, but still it's there."

"Ice?" At this new altitude ice on the wings could explain such a feeling.

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Lieutenant Gainsway nodded.

"Guess so," he said. "Take a look at the overshoe on the wings, will you? And check the alcohol flow into the carburetor. We can't afford to take chances."

And as the man turned to look out, Ronny knew in his heart that no ice was causing that vibration. He breathed a little prayer.

The flotilla stretched out over the horizon below. The leading vessels were out of sight of the laggards. The patrol craft were two cruisers and four destroyers—hardly enough for such a job, Ronny thought, but there was reason to believe that a battle-cruiser was cruising within a fairly brief radius and could be counted on in the event that a large German raider should put in its appearance. The pitiful inadequacy of war craft in general on such a vast expanse of ocean struck Ronny forcefully. He saw young Closter, homely, wide-mouthed, earnest, sitting huddled over the controls of his instrument, his odd face alight with an almost fanatical glow. This was Closter's moment. Nothing else mattered any more. That metal box with its dials and verniers and contraptions might have what it would take to make that scattered flotilla safe. That box, that "bloop," as Closter called it lovingly, was the veritable soul of this new big plane. New orders were to fly in a great circle, keeping a fifty-mile radius from the convoy, and report by radio every sixty seconds.

So much for the orders. The flight from Coolidge Station had covered a distance of well over five hundred miles, a full fifth of their fuel capacity. Meters showed that the oil consumption of the new engines was high—a little higher than their original estimate. Nothing in the orders implied any return for refueling. Did they think a plane could fly without gas and oil?

The speckled vista of sea dotted by crawling bugs which were big ships faded and became merely open sea behind them. The bad weather had spent its course and had fled south and west. The sun shone again. The sea sparkled. Visibility was high. Spotting-planes of a hostile Navy could locate the flotilla nearly a hundred miles away. It was perfect raiding weather, this April fifteenth!

Closter hovered over his dials, frowning, twisting, pointing the parallel fiber tubes with extreme care and attention over the whole sweep of half the compass. His earphones were a part of his

head. He was a man concentrated, rapt, lost in a world of his own making.

Suddenly he looked up and motioned to Gainsway.

"I got somethin'," he said. "But it don't make sense."

Ronny put the ship on the gyro control, or "Iron Mike," and gave his attention to the radio-man. What puzzled the inventor was that his instrument showed the presence of some considerable metallic substance, not at any discernible range from the ship, but actually where the plane was flying, or as approximately as the device could register.

THEY strained their eyes over the horizon. Not a speck showed: nothing—no plane, no ship. And yet at their flying speed, which was some two hundred miles an hour, the cross-hairs of the indicator kept slipping back, as though the spot indicated were receding.

Ronny's brain worked fast.

"Subs," he said. "It could be subs."

"Too big. Distortion is too strong," said Closter. "They'd have to be a whole damn' fleet of 'em to make such a heterodyne."

But even as he spoke, they both knew that this was exactly what the instrument had picked up.

The report was radioed back at once, "*Evidences of considerable force of undersea craft*," and the location was given. And while the message was being transmitted, the howl in the headphones suddenly became stronger, sharper.

Serviss stepped into the cockpit and saw the look on the faces of both men.

"What is it?" he asked.

Ronny had not seen the adjustment of the indicator, but he was certain of the answer.

"Planes," he said. "And about twenty subs right under us. This is it, Serviss. This is our cue."

Closter showed that the airplanes—if they were what they seemed—were approaching at a distance of some two hundred miles, but from the direction of the convoy. This would mean, of course, that they were the *other* side of the convoy and already within a hundred miles or so.

Suppressed excitement now took over the plane. It was evident that Closter's "bloop" had picked up a strong formation of aircraft which were on the lookout for the flotilla of merchantmen, and probably flying a zigzag course over a wide sea-lane, communicating with sub-

marine wolf-packs at each end of their immediate leg. Thus they would cover a considerable seeing range, and never fail to be out of communication with their undersea craft. Thus also each round-trip cross-flight would more or less compensate for the sluggishness of the submarines.

Closter sent out his information to the convoy. He learned that an aircraft carrier, the *Unicorn*, had joined them, and that a battle-cruiser was on its way. Serviss manifested his eagerness to fly to the convoy and to help in the battle which seemed to be imminent. So, quite obviously, was the desire of the enlisted men. A sudden warlike wave swept through the plane. Ronny Gainsway himself was conscious of a similar urge, even though he knew that the big bomber carried only one cannon in its nose, and was virtually useless in such a mêlée as seemed imminent.

BUT strongly, overwhelmingly inside him, a new and calmer judgment dictated. When he talked to the men, he was not the youthful Lieutenant Gainsway, daredevil test-pilot of Coolidge Station. He was able to say:

"Our job is to fly in a circle and keep pumping back information. The chances are that the Nazis have gone all-out for this convoy. There will be more planes and more subs somewhere, and we'll have to find them—quick, too. There may even be a floating base somewhere within a few hundred miles. The importance of this convoy is so great that we may expect any kind of effort to sink it. We'll fly our course, men. Remember that, thanks to Closter, we're giving the British something they've never had before—a chance to engage these fellows at a distance from the convoy. They'll know what to do. Besides, we aren't at war. And if we were, we still wouldn't be any good in this show. Get back to your stations, men. We'll play out our hand."

He might have said more. He might have reminded Serviss that the vibration noticeable at the controls had not disappeared, though the ship was now flying at an altitude which made ice on the wings most unlikely, and though there was no sleet to freeze. He might have told them to forget the planes and the subs and the convoy for a moment and to listen—to listen and to feel. For the creak of the great plane in the air—and there are often creaky noises in these big ships—had changed its pitch. A slight

shudder was perceptible now and then, as though the huge structure were weakening. It was very slight, almost nonexistent. It may have been that the others were not sensitive to such changes. But the changes were there.

It was a happy thing to see young Trueman Closter's face, alive with the realization that he had given a new and priceless weapon to the American Navy. He kept chattering, half to himself, half to anyone who cared to listen:

"Jus' wait till we get back," he would say. "Jus' lemme get my hands on some of that equipment Cap'n Furrow told me he'd let me use. This ol' bloop aint nothin' yet. I'm gonna put in another oscillating circuit. I'm gonna make this here baby work in three dimensions. I'm gonna make it so's it'll tell 'em how high a plane is flyin', about, and maybe how deep them subs are. Jes' wait till I build me a new model. This here ain't even a beginnin' o' what we can do with this here bloop."

Just then the flying-boat shuddered like a man whose future grave has been violated. There was no mistaking it now. There was no concealing it from the men. Ronald Gainsway understood, although the shudder lasted but a fractional second. The big plane had passed through a pocket in which the air-pressure on her hull had been lessened. The thrust of her props relaxed for an instant. The tightness of her grip in the air slackened.

And in that brief moment the tremendous centrifugal force of her engines crept through the plane and discovered—a flaw. Somewhere the plastic structure was failing.

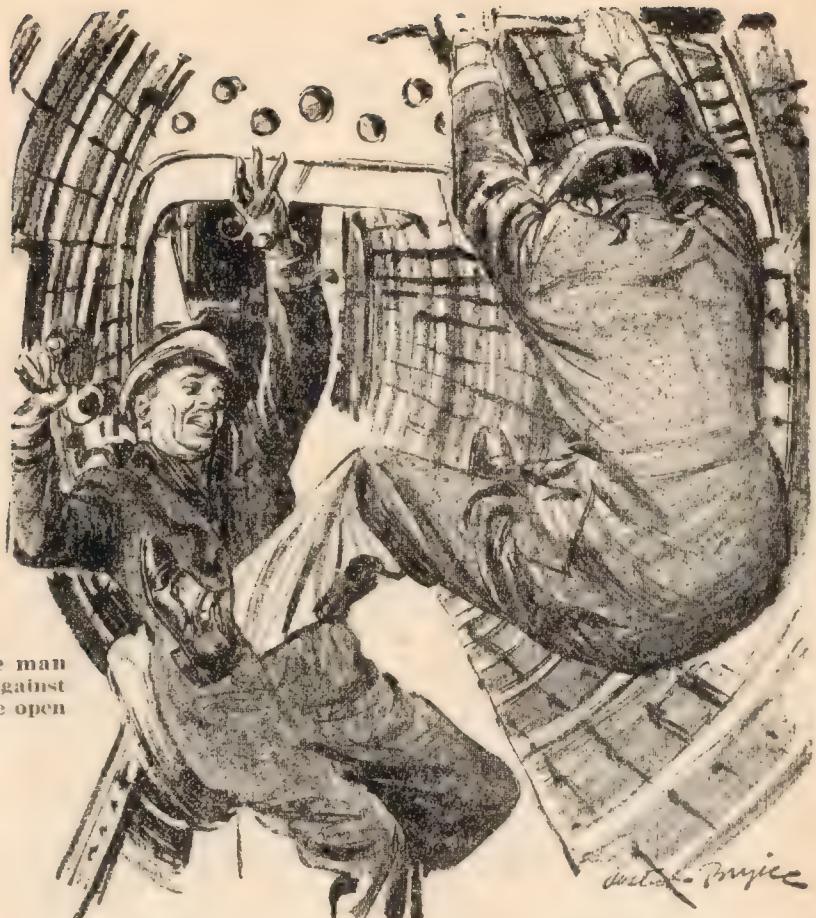
"Hi! Now, that was really a bump! Never felt one just like that," said Serviss. "Maybe we'd better climb up out of this."

Ronny shook his head.

"Leave her on the gyro," he said. "She'll be all right awhile."

What he meant was that he did not want Serviss' hands to feel the vibration in the controls. What he knew was that this plane would not face the problem of refueling that day. This plane would not live another five hundred miles.

CLOSTER'S instrument surpassed all hopes and expectations save perhaps those of its inventor. By constantly picking up the convoy, it helped Ronny Gainsway to keep his flying radius from the lumbering ships so precious to mil-



Ronny saw the man fall backward, against the frame of the open door.

lions of people. It was able to follow the general movement of the submarines and to discover that they had not yet changed their general direction of travel, implying that the scouting patrols of the enemy had not yet picked up the flotilla. It verified the zigzag course of the patrol, too, and it gave the flying-officers something like a complete diagram of the movements of all craft in air or water within several hundred miles of the big plane.

And then, as its zenith, it located the floating base.

The base was picked up very weakly but positively. It lay straight ahead in the path of the flying plane. Naturally its shape and dimension could not be determined. The distortions of the heterodyne indicated only that some metallic mass lay at a certain point ahead, a mass relatively tiny and seemingly immobile. Since it lay straight ahead on their course, Ronny took the controls and brought the big plane to an altitude at which it would not be easily discovered, but from which, with the aid of lenses, they might make out what lay below.

They did. It looked like a miniature island. Above it, flying at about three thousand feet, were swarms of small aircraft. Closter's detector gave evidence that a great many undersea craft were radiating from it and about it for fairly considerable distances. Under study of the glass, it appeared as a gigantic flat pancake, evidently assembled on pontoons, probably towed in separate pieces to this point in midocean and assembled there, ready for this, the Nazis' deadliest blow against Britain's lifeline with America. Ronny estimated that its flat surface could handle as many as two hundred smaller planes and perhaps half as many bombers. What lay under it in the water to accommodate submarines he could only guess. This, he knew, was the heart and soul of the German sea-power. If the British were to strike here—and quickly—the flotilla's chances of crossing intact would be safe.

THEN trouble came.

True Closter had switched in his radio and was calling the flagship of the patrol when the starboard motor began

to sputter. A tremor shook the big ship. A frantic signal from the mechanic at the starboard nacelle came sounding in. The tachometer wavered, fell off, went wild. Ronny seized the controls, threw off the Iron Mike, felt the twist and torque of the off-balance motor pull.

And the shudder of the plane continued, grew worse, became a racking.

In any ordinary aircraft the stoppage of one motor is a serious thing but not necessarily fatal. But this was a defective plane. Somewhere in that maze of cantilevers and struts and stringers all cast from the gleaming, translucent *granite*, for which a toughness greater than steel was claimed, was failure. On paper this plane was perfect; but they were not flying it on paper: they were flying at an altitude of ten thousand feet above the ocean.

RONNY headed the plane into the wind where the tension of wing-strain would increase, but where it would be steadier.

Then he called all hands into the main cabin.

"Every man will put on his 'chute. Lieutenant Serviss will stand by to see that all of you bail out cleanly—wearing life-belts. Closter, you will go last; while the others are bailing out, you will give me some sort of superficial instruction in your detector instrument. I shall keep it operating until this plane falls apart, which it will in a matter of minutes."

They were silent. They knew now. They felt that fatal shaking. If they could clear the plane and float in the water, there was just a chance that British patrol-flyers could pick them up. If they stayed in the plane, there was no chance.

Closter peered at the young officer. "You aint gonna stay alone, sir?"

Ronny's voice crackled.

"You heard my orders, Closter."

And suddenly this big, young officer who had seemed merely a boy, took on a new aspect to them all.

Someone asked:

"What about the Commander, sir? Is he still sick? Shall we take him along with us? Or what—"

Gainsway shook his head. Somehow he could not bring himself to give them the truth about Commander Jelliffe. These were Navy men—men who felt that the Navy was nearly infallible, nearly invincible. To give them, in this their last minute, perhaps, the knowledge

that a foreign agent had been able to gain a commission as an officer, was a thing he couldn't do.

"The Commander," he said, "stays by his ship." He said it sententiously, solemnly. He said it with an effort to keep the anger and disgust from his voice. But he said it convincingly. "All right, men, you have your orders."

They obeyed him. They all stared at him as they left to obey, and they stared at each other. These men knew, now, what Lieutenant Gainsway was doing, what already he had done. It was not true, of course, that a commander in the air will cling to the ancient rule of the sea, that he will remain in his plane while there remains a spar intact. Not true, and they knew it.

"It aint," whispered one of the mechanics to the other, "human. *He* aint human! Feel this here crate shake. Listen at that vibration. This ship won't be nothin' but scraps of celluloid in ten minutes at this rate. With one motor quittin' cold, there aint a chance. But that bird just hands out orders to bail, like this was a practice party. That guy's got somepin' I aint got. *He* just aint human, is all."

He spoke the thoughts of the others. But it was not quite exact. Ronny was aware of a *duplication* in his own essence. He was not only Ronald Gainsway; he was that and still another person. One was good enough, strong enough, able enough. But the other was stronger, abler, more sure. And it was this nature which dominated, took command of the other.

IT was no mere bravery. The *human* element in Ronny Gainsway had tested dozens of Navy planes, had pulled off wings and bailed out at the last instant, after ripping out the panel instruments. But this other element, the dominant, guiding thing which was newly master in his spirit, worked otherwise. This plane would fall; and the life or death of those men who would try to bail out would be in the hands of God. But in that same matter of minutes those prowling bombers might sight the convoy and might alter their course and converge upon it in a furious attack. More bombers might be cruising directly into the range of Closter's detector. Already he could read in the illuminated panel that some air force was moving from the general direction of the convoy toward the floating base whose location had

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been radioed back. These planes must not be taken by surprise. They must reach the base. They must engage the enemy there, not above or around the convoy. In those last few minutes, this accelerated and intensified Ronald Gainsway knew, the Battle of the Atlantic might be won or lost, the fate of two continents might be at stake. He could not ask his men, could not ask Closter, to stay with him to face that moment when the big ship would shatter into débris. But somebody must stay at that instrument and on that radio. It was merely logic: He would stay.

SERVISS stood with the men, watching to insure that they bailed out cleanly, that their 'chutes did not foul the plane's wings. Ronny spoke crisply into the transmitter:

"Trouble here. Get these bearings. Pick up five men at sea. Stand by for further indications of the enemy."

It was still a long chance for the men, but it was a chance. For himself, he knew, there was no chance.

"This here bloop aint no good without me, sir." That was Closter shouting in his ear. The rest had gone. Closter, not being either brave or cowardly. Closter, loving his own creation, his bloop, and staying by it.

The big ship was limping badly. She could not climb. Her single motor was just barely enough to keep her in the air. The unbalance of her drive increased the shake in her structure. Already there was a wrenching, racking sound to starboard, as though that wing were groaning from the exertion of maintaining its load.

"Something moving in from the southeast, sir," Closter called out. "Planes, by the speed of it. Spreads out a lot. Could be a squadron of bombers."

Ronny heard him shouting into the microphone. The plane was bucking—the starboard wing was visibly shaking.

"They's something crawling up on that float, sir. A ship, by the speed. Looks like the Nazis are gonna get smacked where they live. Those planes to the southeast don't shift their course. They're flying wide of the convoy. Bet they won't see it."

Something happened then.

It seemed as though the ship had struck a wall. It was wrenched side-wise. There was a terrible ripping sound that drowned the single motor's hum. Ronny felt the controls for the bad wing

go useless, broken. Another wrenching, crunching sound. A rush of air. A heart-breaking, swirling feeling as the big ship dropped to starboard and began to swing in a circle. The cockpit tilted at a fantastic angle. The speed of the swirl increased.

Closter shouted:

"They say they've engaged the Nazis. Boy, is that good news, sir! They gotta admit she was a swell old bloop while she lasted."

"Yes," said Ronny, "while she lasted. So long, Closter!"

He said that from an angle of more than forty-five degrees. He was conscious of the swirling speed of the plane as it went into its one-wing spin. Centrifugal force flung him hard against the port side of the cockpit. He saw Closter go headlong, his arms tightly wrapped around the queer black box which was his beloved instrument. Closter's eyes were closed; a smile was on his face.

Things pass quickly in review at such moments:

In memory, Ronny saw his sister and himself, in the laboratory of Dr. Medlow. He saw Medlow holding the little glass syringe with its needle point, wagging his owlish head, saying: "Some little maybe this will hurt, boy."

Did Medlow know how deeply it had hurt? How vitally it had taken its hold? Did Medlow know what it was he had discovered in this serum? Ronny wondered about that, abstractedly. It was one thing to create something and call it a wonder. It was quite another to become that same wonder! In a minute, now, it would be over. The shattered plane was whirling fast. He would be unconscious long before they struck.

BUT he wondered about Medlow and his science.

"It was a good thing for me," he mused, "because it helped me see this job through. But would it be any good for folks in general? Wouldn't it be a lot happier if they could go on making their mistakes and being—human?"

He thought he heard some kind of cry. It may have been the wind, which was now tearing whole pieces from the stricken hull of the plane. . . . It may have been Closter, shouting one more good-by as he clutched his precious box and fell into space. . . . It may have been the cry of Ronny's own soul, as it bade farewell to its earthly habitation.

Decoy Heiress

By ROBERT R. MILL

THIS job," declared Captain Charles Field, commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, "is right down your alley."

"Yes sir." Lieutenant Edward David, the six-footer better known as "Tiny," noted with apprehension the satisfied look on the face of his superior officer.

"The job," continued Captain Field, "calls for a man who is not known around Lake Iris. Check."

"I never happened to work there, sir," Mr. David admitted.

"The job requires the ability to sit patiently on the front porch of the Lake Iris Club for days, probably weeks and even months. We haven't a better porch-sitter in the outfit."

Mr. David maintained a discreet silence.

"It will be necessary to look and act like a rich moron. You have all the qualifications except the money. That will be provided."

Mr. David brightened.

"After the money has been spent," Captain Field went on, "and nothing has been accomplished, there will be a day of reckoning. That will give you a chance to use your own particular talents to the best advantage. Given time, and the proper incentive, you could justify Hitler. In this case you will have the incentive, because your job will be at stake, and off-hand I can't think of any other place where you would find what we jokingly call employment."

"What am I supposed to do, sir?" asked Mr. David.

Captain Field, however, refused to be hurried.

"A blackmail artist is working the summer colony at Lake Iris. He has made two or three successful hauls. He specializes on indiscreet, foolish women."

"Am I supposed to pose as an indiscreet, foolish woman?" Mr. David demanded.

Captain Field pondered. "You are indiscreet and foolish, but maybe we better not try to make a woman out of you. All you have to do is nab this bird and his outfit."

"Yes sir." Mr. David produced a notebook. "If the Captain will give me the dope—"

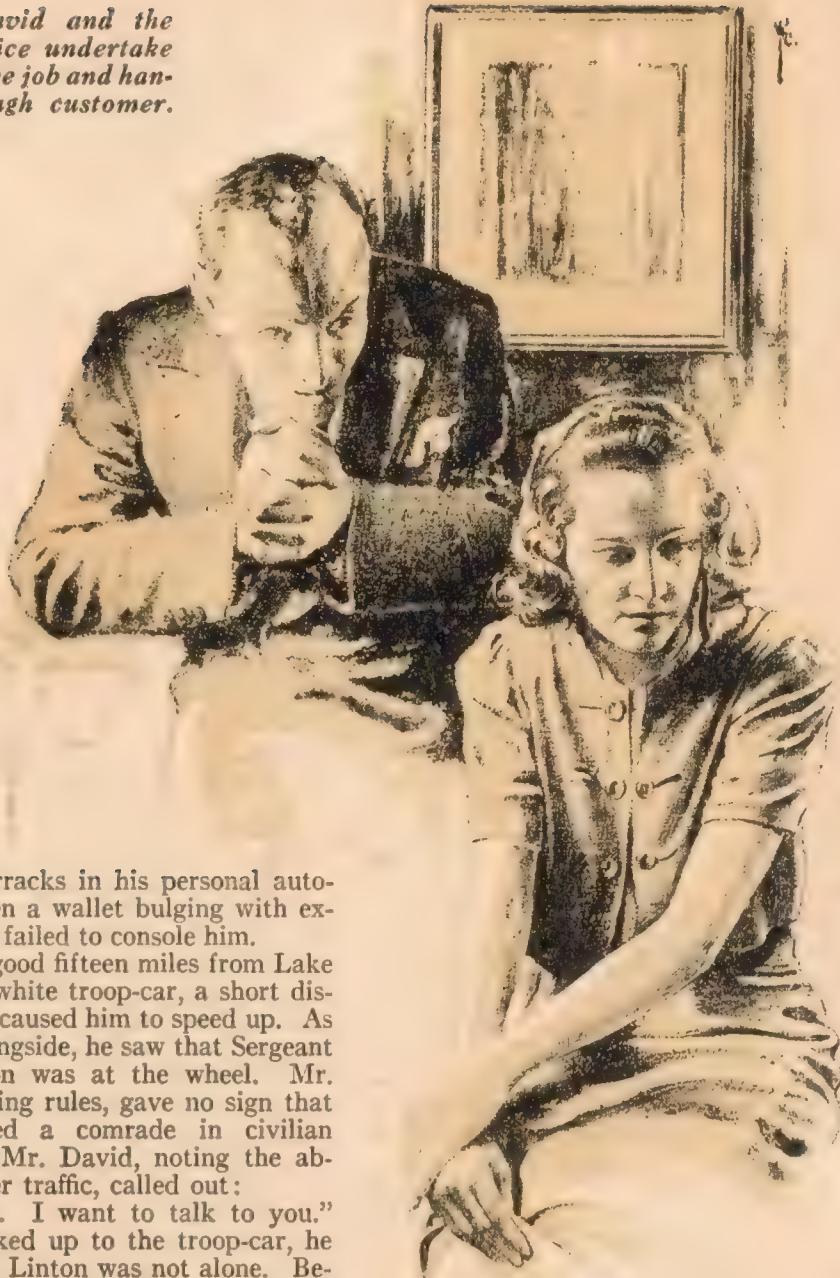
"You have the dope," Captain Field declared. "My informant prefers to be nameless. She is cagey, and she has influence enough to make us respect her wishes. She has been hooked, but she denies it, so we can't press her to give us the name of the blackmailer. The other victims feel the same way about it. That makes it swell for the blackmailer and tough for us. We are in a particularly tough spot, because she put up plenty of money for all necessary expenses, and offered a reward of ten thousand dollars besides. I told her we didn't go in for rewards, but she insisted on leaving her check. She wants action; she is willing to pay for it; and if she doesn't get it, she has the ability and the inclination to make plenty of trouble."

"But she won't do a thing to help us, sir," Tiny David protested.

"You are quick like that," Captain Field admitted. "She paid once, because she was afraid. She wants revenge, and she is willing to pay for it, but even her desire for revenge is secondary to her fear of exposure. She trusts me because certain connections assured her I was all right. But even with me she won't go the whole way. She insists that she wasn't one of the victims, and as long as she sticks to her story, I can't demand more details." He stood up. "Anyway, I can't lose. If you crack the case, I get good marks in certain quarters. If you don't, my hair will get gray much more slowly, because certain worries will be removed from my daily life. Get me?"

Mr. David did. He was not happy as he discarded his uniform for good-looking tweeds, packed a bag, and drove away

*Tiny David and the
State police undertake
a detective job and han-
dle a tough customer.*



from the barracks in his personal automobile. Even a wallet bulging with expense-money failed to console him.

He was a good fifteen miles from Lake Iris when a white troop-car, a short distance ahead, caused him to speed up. As he pulled alongside, he saw that Sergeant Henry Linton was at the wheel. Mr. Linton, obeying rules, gave no sign that he recognized a comrade in civilian clothes, but Mr. David, noting the absence of other traffic, called out:

"Pull over. I want to talk to you."

As he walked up to the troop-car, he saw that Mr. Linton was not alone. Beside him sat a girl of sixteen or seventeen. Her large brown eyes were red from crying, and her otherwise pretty face was marred by an expression of defiance.

Mr. Linton shrugged. "This isn't my party, Tiny. Mrs. Browne-Worthingame has said she will be along directly to make a charge.

"What will the charge be?" Tiny David asked.

"I am a thief!" The words came from between the clenched teeth of the girl.

Tiny David grinned. "We all have a bit of larceny in our make-up, but some

of us don't get caught." He jerked his thumb at Mr. Linton. "His mother never could balance the cash in her pocketbook when he was at home. Just what are you supposed to have gone south with?"

The faint smile that had appeared on the girl's face disappeared.

"A dress—a party dress."

"What did you do with it?"

"I put it back—after I had worn it to a party."

Mr. David was beginning to like this girl.

"I wouldn't make any fuss if you borrowed *my* party clothes. You didn't break in anywhere to get the dress, did you?"

"Oh, no. I live with Mrs. Browne-Worthingame—that is, I work there."

MR. DAVID lighted a cigarette. "Suppose you tell me all about it."

"There was a dance at the town hall last night, and all the girls I know were going. I asked Mrs. Browne-Worthingame about it, but she said I had to stay at home. Then she had a headache, and went to bed early. I decided to sneak out, but I didn't have anything to wear. Her daughter—she's about my size—was away, and I looked in her room. The dress was there. I—I just borrowed it."

"Have a good time?"

"Wonderful! But Mrs. Browne-Worthingame was waiting for me when I came home. She said I was a thief, and she locked me in my room. This morning, as soon as she was up, she called the police, and this man came. He tried to talk her out of it, but she ordered him to take me to the police-station, and she said she would be along in a little while to see that I get what I deserve."

"What kind of work have you been doing for this lovely lady?"

"A little bit of everything. I read to her, and I write her letters. I guess I have been a sort of companion. I have to wait up for her when she is out late at night, because she likes to have me read her to sleep, and during the whole summer she hasn't stayed at home more than three nights."

"How much has she been paying you for all that?"

"Nothing—yet."

"What?"

"That's right. You see, I had been counting on going away to school this fall, and I only needed about a hundred dollars more. But early this spring, something—something happened." She lowered her voice. "My father died."

There was something about this big man that inspired confidence.

"That meant I had no home. It meant that I needed a job just to live, and that school was impossible. Then a friend sent me to Mrs. Browne-Worthingame. She agreed to give me a home for the summer, and said that she would make up

the hundred dollars I needed when it was time to start for school. She meant to be kind."

"Very kind!" said Tiny David. "She works you day and night all summer for a hundred dollars." His official manner returned. "That's a clear-cut violation of the Wages and Hours Act."

Mr. Linton displayed a trace of impatience.

"The Act doesn't cover domestic service. You know that."

"Mrs. Browne-Worthingame doesn't," Mr. David retorted. "You go back there, and tell her that unless she drops the charges and keeps her mouth shut, this girl will have her prosecuted. Collect the girl's wages in full. Tell the old dame she will send for her things later."

Mr. Linton shook his head sadly.

"There is a law covering that, too."

"Mrs. Browne-Worthingame doesn't know that law, either. You go do what I told you." He turned to the girl. "You wait here with me. It won't help you any if some of the local inhabitants see you riding around in a troop-car."

IN the car Tiny and the girl sat side by side. "What's your name?" he asked. "Helen Arnold. Do you think he will—will get away with that?"

Tiny David chuckled.

"You don't know Linny. That will be simple for him. By the way, what sort of school are you headed for?"

"A school of journalism." She saw his raised eyebrows. "I want to be a reporter. My father was a newspaper man. He had to come up here for his health." The worried frown returned to her face. "But everything has changed now."

Tiny David ignored the statement.

"You look like a smart girl."

She shrugged.

"Think you could be a convincing actress?"

Her eyes narrowed. An invisible hand put an iron weight on her heart. She hadn't expected this from him.

"I know." Her voice was cold. "I don't need to worry. You have a friend who will get me a screen-test. I have heard that before. The last man I heard it from got his face slapped."

Tiny David ducked an imaginary blow.

"You'll do! But you have me wrong. I'm just a cop, up against a tough job. A smart girl could help me. How about it?"

The weight was lifted from her heart.

"What is the tough job?" she parried.

They were deep in conversation when Mr. Linton returned.

"The world," Mr. Linton began, "has Mrs. Browne-Worthingame all wrong. Underneath it all, she has a heart of gold. I'll admit you need a steam-shovel to get down to that heart, but I made the grade."

He turned to the girl:

"She has changed her mind about the dress." His hand explored a pocket. "Instead of the hundred smackers she promised you, she has given me a check for two hundred of the best. She says she intended to do that from the first. I believe her, but I always was so trusting that for a long time my parents thought I wasn't quite bright."

"I only want what I earned," said Helen Arnold. "I'll return the rest to her."

"You will not," Tiny David ruled. "You earned all of it."

"Don't interrupt my thoughts," Mr. Linton begged. "There was another matter under discussion. Oh, yes; I remember. She hopes you will change your mind about bringing up the Wages and Hours Act. She is in somewhat of a dither about it, and would like to know your decision as soon as possible. I would inform her promptly—sometime tomorrow."

"Will you tell her that's all right?" the girl asked.

"I certainly will," Mr. Linton promised. "There may be a slight delay, but her great heart shows to the best advantage under strain, so no harm will be done."

"Had time to think over my scheme?" Tiny David asked the girl.

"Yes. I'd like to try it. I'll do my best."

"That's good enough for me."

"What's this all about?" Mr. Linton demanded.

Mr. David told him.

"It may work," Mr. Linton admitted. "Anyway, I don't blame you for trying everything before going on relief."

Mr. David ignored that pleasantry as he produced the well-filled wallet.

"This will take money. You'll need new clothes. And there will be living-expenses. By the way, where will you live?"

"I could board with Mrs. Grayson," Helen Arnold suggested.

"Fine," said Tiny David. "I'll take you there; and when you get settled, you can send for your things." He grinned.

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering



"Many a time I have held Helen on my knee," he declared. "She was a sweet kid."

"I am an old friend. Knew you and your father in the city." He turned to Mr. Linton. "You get off here. We'll call you when, and if, you are needed. Meanwhile, it won't help us any to be seen with an ordinary trooper."

"Don't I get any expense-money?" Mr. Linton demanded.

"It has been nice to see you," said Mr. David. "I really relish an occasional contact with the working-classes." He stuck his head out the window to deliver a parting shot. "You might put in your time trying to find out who went over your head to take their troubles direct to the Skipper. They must think very highly of you."

THE following morning found Mr. David installed at the exclusive Lake Iris Club, giving a convincing impersonation of Mr. George Holmes, an overtaxed broker.

"I look as healthy as a horse," he explained to an elderly woman whose word-of-mouth circulation exceeded that of many a country newspaper. "Nerves. Just can't seem to pull myself together."

"I know," cooed his confidant. "It's all the fault of those New Dealers."

Mr. Holmes was a success from the start. He played Russian roulette with the old man every other guest avoided. He



Helen Arnold drew back, clutching the torn dress. . . . A light flashed on.

played eighteen holes of golf with the club duffer. He cheerfully allowed the sports director to pair him in a mixed-doubles tennis tournament with a girl everybody was in favor of drowning. He listened attentively and sympathetically to symptoms, as related by members of both sexes.

"Fine chap," was the consensus of male opinion. The feminine side did even better, by declaring, "He's just a darling!"

MEANWHILE, on the opposite shore of Lake Iris, in the less exclusive, and less expensive village of the same name, there was a steadily growing ripple of excitement. It had been started by the arrival of an attorney from Syrchester, seeking one Helen Arnold, the daughter of Richard Arnold, who had been a newspaper man.

After some investigation, Miss Arnold was located at the home of Mrs. William Grayson. Skillful inquiry established that this was the Miss Arnold wanted, and then the lawyer got down to business.

Did Miss Arnold remember an uncle? Miss Arnold pondered, and then remembered vaguely that her father had spoken of a brother, who lived in some foreign country.

Thereupon the attorney beamed. The gentleman in question was one Peter Allensby Arnold, her father's brother, and of course, her Uncle Peter. The lawyer's face reflected professional sorrow; he had the painful duty of telling her that Uncle Peter had died in the Argentine.

Miss Arnold expressed the maximum of sorrow possible for the demise of an uncle whose existence and death had been brought to her attention at the same time. With that out of the way, the legal gentleman turned to more pleasant matters. Uncle Peter had left property, considerable property. He also had left a will, which provided that the property belonged to Miss Arnold's father, or his heirs. Did Miss Arnold have any brothers or sisters?

Mrs. Grayson, who was relaying all this over the party-line telephone, held her breath until the girl answered: "No." The legal gentleman also seemed relieved. In that event, the entire estate belonged to Miss Arnold. The amount? He could not tell exactly offhand, but somewhere in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand dollars.

After issuing an urgent bulletin, Mrs. Grayson cocked an attentive ear for additional details, which were soon forth-

coming. Uncle Peter, it appeared, had been a strict moralist, who had no intention of having his money dissipated on loose living. Under the terms of the will, Miss Arnold would receive one-third of the estate at once, if her reputation was above reproach. The remainder would be paid over to her three years later, if, during that period, she had not been involved in any scandal. If she had, the money would go to certain charities in which Uncle Peter had been interested.

DESERTING the telephone now, Mrs. Grayson took an active part in the proceedings. Lake Iris boasted no finer girl than Helen Arnold. She knew that. The minister knew it. Everybody knew it. All that city lawyer had to do was to inquire around.

The attorney admitted he had done just that, and that he was more than satisfied. So satisfied that his firm was advancing a substantial sum, which would be placed to Miss Arnold's credit in the local bank, and upon which she could draw. When the first payment from the estate was forthcoming, his firm would deposit that in a Syrchester bank, and would honor any reasonable request from Miss Arnold.

There was just one other matter. This was bound to be followed by publicity. He glanced at Mrs. Grayson with meaning. His firm was an old one, and disliked notoriety. Therefore he was leaving at once, and he would prefer not to have his name used.

That seemed reasonable enough. As Mrs. Grayson's telephoning took shape in the form of local reporters, out-of-town correspondents, photographers, news-reel men and radio crews, the new arrivals found Miss Arnold sufficiently interesting, and were quite content to refer to the departed gentleman as "a member of a prominent legal firm in Syrchester."

Perhaps it was just as well, for the legal gentleman quietly returned to the barracks of a State Police troop in a remote section of the State, and again donned a uniform, the coat of which bore the chevrons of a sergeant. . . .

In due time, the news-stand at the Lake Iris Club was stocked with papers which prominently featured what was a welcome relief in the steady flow of war-news. A lady of uncertain years was moved to share her paper with "that delightful Mr. Holmes."

"Isn't it wonderful?" she gushed. "A regular *Cinderella* story. And right here

in the village! I do hope she is a deserving creature."

Mr. Holmes gave the story the same careful attention he had devoted to the lady's hay-fever. But after reading several paragraphs, he put the paper aside.

"This is a real coincidence," he declared. "I knew her father well, but that was some years ago. Many a time I have held Helen on my knee." He stood up. "I must see if I can get her on the telephone to congratulate her. She was a sweet kid."

Mr. Holmes considerably left the door of the phone-booth slightly ajar. This courtesy was wasted on the club operator, who had the key open, but it was appreciated by the occupants of the lobby, all of whom had hurriedly been informed of the situation by the hay-fever victim.

The call was completed. Mr. Holmes identified himself. The new heiress remembered him, and apparently with pleasure. There was some inconsequential chit-chat, and then Mr. Holmes got down to business. Miss Arnold was dining with him. When? This very evening. Where? Right here at the club. There was a flutter of excited protest.

"Right here at the club," Mr. Holmes repeated firmly. "I'll call for you at seven."

The club operator then put in a busy half-hour, while members hurriedly canceled invitations to dine out. The club manager hastily ordered the chefs to stock up, and put in an emergency call to the local employment bureau for extra waitresses.

Mr. Holmes, meanwhile, donned faultless evening attire. (Each item of it had been duly entered on an expense-account, the total of which was steadily mounting.)

HELEN ARNOLD was frankly thrilled as she dined with her father's friend, Holmes. The food was delicious. The surroundings were perfect. There was a flattering show of interest on the part of the elegantly gowned women and the distinguished-looking men at the tables nearby. She couldn't help hearing fragments of their excited comments:

"Two hundred thousand for being good! That's a novelty." . . . "Wish my uncle had gone to South America instead of Kansas City." . . .

"—She would lose it. Like a morality clause in a movie contract, isn't it?" . . . "Well, with her looks, she doesn't need money."

Later the two had a moment alone.

"The trap is baited," said Mr. Holmes. He glanced down at his youthful companion. "You were swell."

Mr. Holmes resumed his porch-sitting the following morning, and he made no effort to avoid the hay-fever victim.

"Your little friend is charming," declared the lady.

"She is a fine girl," Mr. Holmes admitted. "Completely unspoiled." He had all the earmarks of a doting uncle. "I am going to see that she takes in the club dance next Wednesday."

The lady moved on. . . . Mr. Holmes chuckled to himself.

"That should give her plenty of material for her morning broadcast," he mused. "I only hope the right party is tuned in on it."

That afternoon Mr. Holmes, correctly attired for golf, paused at the clubhouse to pick up his clubs, which was in conformance with his daily routine. Loitering about in an apparently aimless manner was a gentleman who rejoiced in the name of Reggie Woolmert. Previous to this time, relations between Mr. Holmes and Mr. Woolmert had been limited to an occasional, "Good morning."

Today, however, Mr. Woolmert looked up with interest. "Care to play around with me?" he asked.

"Glad to," said Mr. Holmes.

It was a very satisfactory game, from the standpoint of Mr. Holmes. When his drive had distance, Mr. Woolmert also came through with a long drive, which kept the match close, interesting, and pleasing to Mr. Holmes, who despite occasional dubbed shots and missed putts, managed to win by a narrow margin.

After the game they occupied adjoining showers.

"Going to the dance?" asked Mr. Woolmert.

"Uh-huh," sputtered Mr. Holmes.

"Me too," Mr. Woolmert admitted. "Frightful bore, as a general thing, but I'm all to the good on this one. Hectic blonde number coming up from the city." He struggled with water, soap and what appeared to be a kindly impulse. "Nothing but antiques around here. If you are on the loose, I can put through a call. The blonde is long on friends."

"That's darned decent of you," declared Mr. Holmes, "but I happen to know a girl over in the village." He grinned wryly. "If I didn't, I certainly would make you put that offer in writing, so you couldn't back out on it."

Mr. Woolmert dismissed the implied thanks with an airy wave of the hand.

"S'nothing. Just cast a line to a fellow-sufferer." He allowed a half-donned sock to wait while he surrendered to a second generous impulse. "Say, if you and the village maiden aren't dated on a party, you might like to team up with me and the hectic one on a table for four. Sort of mutual protection."

"That's a thought," Mr. Holmes stated, "and a sound one. Give me your pen, and I'll sign."

Mr. Woolmert grinned.

"The social director is the only one to require a signature. I'll fix that after dinner. What's the village maiden's name?"

"Miss Arnold," replied Mr. Holmes. "Helen Arnold."

Mr. Woolmert elevated his eyebrows.

"No wonder you passed on a blind date! Leave it to me to offer a ham sandwich to a man about to sit down to a banquet!"

IT was the usual Iris Club dance, with Helen Arnold easily the most attractive girl on the floor. Mr. Woolmert's "hectic one" turned out to be a rather metallic blonde, who almost from the start displayed considerable interest in Mr. Holmes. Shortly before midnight Mr. Woolmert put forth what was greeted as a bright suggestion:

"As a home for elderly spinsters this place qualifies. Why not go where we fit in with the color scheme?"

The Swiss Chalet seemed to answer that description. Mr. Woolmert regarded the floor-show with pleasure.

"Enough of the Oriental in me to prefer to hire other people to do my dancing."

"Five minutes on a dance-floor with you would give any girl the same idea," snapped the blonde.

Mr. Woolmert beamed on her.

"You can't win me with flattery," he asserted.

It was a good hour later when a man, evidently the manager, approached Mr. Woolmert.

"Is the gent with you named Holmes?"

Mr. Woolmert regarded him with drunken gravity.

"Be a shock to his mother if he isn't."

The manager addressed Mr. Holmes.

"The club operator has been trying all the joints in the neighborhood to get you. She says it is important."

Mr. Holmes excused himself. Soon he was back, his face rueful.

"I hate to leave this party, but that's what happens to a working-man, particularly when his boss is also his uncle. They have some confidential information that will turn the market upside down shortly after the opening in the morning. I have to hurry back to the club, and get off a batch of telegrams to pet clients I take care of personally."

The blonde protested violently. Miss Arnold preserved a regretful silence. Mr. Woolmert gave solemn approval:

"That's right. Honor thy uncles and aunts. The Bible says that. But you aren't going to take Miss Arnold away from us?"

Mr. Holmes turned to the girl.

"No reason why your evening should be ruined."

"Right!" declared Mr. Woolmert. "She shall have the same tender care I would give to a ticket on a Preakness winner."

He was as good as his word, and when the party broke up, he went into direct action:

"Lucille's staying at what the village calls a hotel. Hell for propriety, Lucille! Park her there first."

Mr. Woolmert signaled a cab.

"Then I'll see you safe and sound on your own doorstep."

Again he was as good as his word. A trooper, who was in plain-clothes, and who sat at the wheel of a car parked along a side street, picked up the cab, and followed it at a discreet distance to the village hotel, and then to Helen Arnold's stopping-place. There the trooper continued on his way; and Sergeant Linton, who was hidden in the bushes near by, took up the vigil.

The cab halted. Mr. Woolmert reached for the door, but his clumsy fingers tore a shoulder-strap of Helen Arnold's gown. "So sorry!" Helen Arnold drew back, clutching the torn dress. . . . Mr. Woolmert bent over her. A light flashed on in the roof of the cab. It was an unusually bright light. Then the driver had the door open, and the bright light went dark.

Sergeant Linton chuckled to himself as he heard the girl make somewhat cold replies to the man's apologies; and his fists unclenched as the cab, containing Mr. Woolmert, drove away, while the girl hurriedly entered the house. . . .

Back at the Iris Club, Mr. Holmes was in earnest conversation with one of the clerks, an intelligent young man, who had agreed to make some discreet inquiries among his fellow-employees. Mr. Woolmert had first appeared at the club

during the present season. He had been admitted on the written request of a member who was well known, but who had not been at the club for three years. Nothing was known of Mr. Woolmert's business connections, but he appeared to have plenty of money.

"He cultivates wealthy members," the clerk explained, "and he seems to go over big for a while. Then, the next thing you know, he is going around with another crowd. I have made a list of some of his former friends."

Mr. Holmes examined the paper, and a smile crossed his broad face.

"You certainly have been helpful," he declared.

The following afternoon Mr. Holmes and Helen Arnold walked along the shore of Lake Iris.

"I was scared to death," the girl admitted, as she related what had happened the night before. "Is he the right one? What will happen now?"

Mr. Holmes disposed of the items in order:

"You weren't alone at any time. Yes, Woolmert is the gent. He has a nice picture of you and himself, taken in the cab; double-exposure and an airbrush will change it into something that would not gladden the hearts of your uncle's executors, who will pass on your conduct, supposedly. . . . It's my guess that you'll have a chance to buy that picture. There will be nothing crude, and everything will be strictly legal. Now don't worry: we'll be right with you; you are doing great."

THREE days later, it was, that Miss Arnold received a visit from a dark, suave little man, Mr. Goerkle, who came to the point at once:

"Miss Arnold, I got here a thousand shares of Gold Mines, Limited, which I can sell to you for fifteen dollars a share. . . . Now wait."

Mr. Goerkle lifted a plump hand.

"The stock aint listed, and I'm being on the up-and-up with you, because I'm telling you the last shares what was sold didn't bring that figure. But this here is a stock just made for you. I know it's goin' to turn out to be a good buy at the figger I quoted."

Miss Arnold's expression was a combination of surprise and amusement.

"I haven't money enough to buy stock; and if I did, I would let my lawyer attend to it for me."

Mr. Goerkle waved that aside.

"I guess you could get the dough, if you



had to. And this is strictly between you and me. It's better for you that way."

Miss Arnold stood up. "I'm not interested. Good afternoon, Mr. Goerkle."

Mr. Goerkle took his dismissal with remarkably good grace.

"O. K., lady. I aint pressin' you. But you think it over. You may get a different slant on it. I'll be back."

The next day Miss Arnold received another visitor, also a Mr. Goerkle, but not the salesman of doubtful gold stock.

"The place where I work develops pictures for the club," he asserted, "and you're having a raw deal put over on you. That guy Woolmert makes a specialty of getting candid shots of his girl friends, and putting 'em on the spot. Has a camera mounted in a cab, and the door acts as a trigger for the flash and the camera shutter. Nice, clean fun!"

He fumbled in a pocket, and produced a print of a picture.

Helen Arnold felt the red mount to her hair. No acting was necessary. The knowledge that the world contained people this vile made her violently ill.

"Ordinarily," went on the oily voice, "I wouldn't butt in. The average dame can take care of herself. But Woolmert's

clowning is likely to put you in a tough spot, what with you having to be careful on account of getting your money. That's why I gave you a gander at it before he flashes it on you. Tell him to go easy, because if the wrong guys get a slant at this, you are out important cash."

She summoned all her courage.

"Has he one of these—these pictures?"

"Not yet. We got the negative in the shop. But I got to deliver it to him, and the prints he ordered. If I don't, he will squawk, and we lose the club business. That means I'm out a job. I'm a good guy, but I got to eat."

She wondered at herself as she heard her own impassioned pleas to this repulsive-looking little man.

"Tell you what," he said at last, "maybe we can get together. I don't want no money—I aint that kind; but I got a brother. You know him. He tried to let you in on a good stock deal. You turned him down. That was a bum break for him, and me—and you, lady! Was you to buy it, he would split the profit with me. Then I could have him slip you the negative and the prints, and I could let the job go hang."

He eyed her shrewdly.

"Tell you what: The bank aint closed yet. Suppose you run down there and get the jack for the stock. When you get back, give me a ring at this number. My brother will be right up with the stock and the pictures." A note of steel crept into his voice. "If I was you, sister, I wouldn't say nothin' to nobody. If the guy at the bank gets nosey, tell him you are going to the city to do some shopping."

She moistened her dry lips with her tongue. "I will. Tha—thank you."

HELEN ARNOLD hung up the telephone, and turned to Tiny David, the erstwhile Mr. Holmes, who stood at her side in the living-room.

"He will be here in a minute."

"I'll be within hearing distance," Tiny David promised. "Chin up, Helen. This is the last lap."

He walked from the room.

Mr. Goerkle, the stock-salesman, made a breezy entrance.

"Glad you seen the light, sister. I had a hunch you would. This here stock is just what you need." He placed some certificates on a table. "Say, my brother told me to give you this. It's a negative and some prints. He says not to worry, because there aint no more." His leer



"Cop, eh? I aint done nuttin'! This here was an up-and-up deal in stock!"

made her shudder. "Always glad to oblige a customer."

She felt a wild impulse to tear up the pictures, but Tiny David's warning, and promise that they would be destroyed as soon as a confession was obtained from the gang, restrained her.

"Come on, sister—ante up! Let's see the money for the stock."

SHE opened her handbag, and took out a sheaf of bank-notes. Seizing them, the man began a count. Then a look of rage crossed his face.

"Say! What's the big idea? There aint even a grand here. Tight, eh? Well, them pictures will loosen you up. Just you—"

The door opened. Tiny David entered the room. The revolver in his right hand covered Goerkle.

"Stick them up!" he ordered.

Goerkle's beady eyes flashed.

"Cop, eh? I aint done nuttin'! This here was an up-and-up deal in stock. I can—"

"I know," said Tiny David. One big hand seized the collar of Goerkle's coat, while the other covered the little man's mouth. "Sergeant Linton is waiting to give you a nice ride. We already have what you jokingly call your brother; also

Woolmert, the blonde and the cab-driver. We will take you over to the barracks, and sort you out." He spoke over his shoulder to the girl. "You and I will trail along in my car. These birds aren't company I would recommend to an heiress and a Lake Iris Club member." And he started out. . . .

Helen Arnold sat waiting in Captain Field's office. At first she had been somewhat afraid of the gruff man behind the desk, but now her fear had worn off.

"So you want to study to be a newspaper reporter?"

"That's right, Captain. I want that more than anything else in the world."

"Humph! I thought telling lies came natural to most reporters, but maybe a college education does help."

She looked at him closely. This time she was sure. His eyes were twinkling.

"Can't understand why anybody would pick that job," Captain Field continued, "but I've even known birds who saved money to go to school and learn to be an undertaker."

She tried a smile.

"Maybe it's best that we don't all pick the same calling, Captain."

The smile was returned.

"Right! And any calling gets a break when a girl like you decides to follow it."

DECoy HEIRESS

"I beg your pardon!" They looked up to see Tiny David standing in the doorway. "We have them sorted out, sir, and they listened to reason. Mr. Woolmert saw the light first, and the rest followed close behind. Signed confessions from all of them... An air-tight case." He proceeded to tear the negative and the prints into fine pieces. "We found six more prints, which they had laid by—just in case."

Captain Field was on his knees before a safe.

"This ends you as an heiress, Helen," Tiny David continued, "and brings you back to reality. Just the same, I think you will be able to manage the school of journalism very nicely."

Captain Field was on his feet again.

"Ten thousand dollars' worth of it," he asserted. "It's a reward, my dear. You have earned it. That big lout with the silly grin on his face couldn't take any of it, even if he wanted to. Regulations."

He cleared his throat noisily, and became quite official.

"Be a bit of a delay. Promised the person who gave the reward she wouldn't appear in this. Give you the money as soon as I can get the check cashed in the morning."

Tiny David's voice was bland:

"One dollar will get the Captain five that I can tell him the name on that check."

"You know too much!" barked Captain Field. "And a lot of guys on relief have the same ailment." His curiosity got the better of him. "How did you find out?"

"I learned that she and Woolmert were pals for a time, sir. Then Woolmert admitted that he shook her down for plenty. I figured she wasn't the kind to stand that without doing something."

"I have nothing to say," Captain Field declared.

Tiny David's crooked grin was broader as he turned to the girl.

"Justice may be blind, Helen, but she manages to peek now and then. Mrs. Browne-Worthingame has put up the money for your education, with enough left over to give you a good start when you are ready to shift for yourself. No, don't thank me. Don't thank the Captain. And for God's sake, don't thank Mrs. Browne-Worthingame. If you do, it's a sure bet the Captain never will call you 'my dear' again."

Robert Mill will give us another story of Tiny David, in an early issue.

You've Got

WITH the click of the Sheriff's spurs outside the vine-covered veranda, Bill Daily rose from his chair to stand, six feet and three inches from booteels to iron-gray hair, his figure straight and wiry as a lodgepole pine. The cattle baron's face, tanned by years of Dakota sunshine and wind, usually as serene and kindly as the sky above his ranch, was troubled—for Jeff Levine, Sheriff of Cottonwood County, was as hard as Daily was gentle. Levine seldom stirred abroad except as a harbinger of trouble, and now the click of his spurs bespoke a warlike frame of mind. "Bill," he declared, pushing by the screen and thrusting a belligerent face as close to his host's as his lesser height would permit, "I discovered where the Kid's holed up, and I'm out to sock the last of the Mattalee gang before sundown."

"Is that so, Jeff?" A fleeting cloud passed across the cattleman's face. But it was gone in an instant, and his voice betrayed no feeling but kindness. "Well sit down and cool off while Molly gets us a drink. That's a son-of-a-gun of a hot wind, and you must have come a long way. —Oh, Mol-lee!" he called. "The Sheriff's here. Anything cool around the house?"

But the Sheriff's mood was not to be softened by hospitality. He stretched his squat form to the limit in an effort to bring his bushy eyebrows to the second button on Daily's vest. He glared at the face of the cattleman as if the fine lines gathering about the smiling eyes of his host constituted a personal affront. "Did you hear what I said? Did you hear me say I was goin' to wipe out the last of that gang right now and plenty?"

"Sure," acknowledged Daily patiently, "I heard you the first time, but it's kind of hot to be killing people right now, and anyway, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the Kid, you see—"

"Darned right I see! I not only see but I savvy you've been makin' love to him and he's been here to see you, and what's more, you're the only one who knows where his hide-out is in Timber Coulee. That's why I'm here, and that's

to Begin Sometime

The man who wrote "The Last of the Thundering Herd" gives us a very human drama of the West that was not all wild.

By **BIGELOW
NEAL**

Illustrated by
Cecil Smith



why you're goin' to show me that shack, and just as soon as a couple of good horses can hike us to it. An' what's more, I'm appointin' you deputy right now so's you don't try to shy out."

Daily smiled. "Sure, Jeff, I know you've got the authority. And I know you've done a good job on getting rid of that gang, and saved me a lot of dough doing it. I know too that you are sort of a relentless old codger with about as much sympathy for a horse-thief as a snapping turtle for a young duck, but you see I wanted to talk to you about the Kid. I—"

"Sure, I know you too. Just because the last of the gang aint old enough to raise a decent crop of whiskers, you've been lettin' him get away with your stock and raise hell in general, while you tried to sign up the dirty pup in the Salvation

Army. Go ahead and shoot off your mouth, but it won't make a danged bit of difference. I'm here to get that fellow, and I'm going to start shootin' the minute I get in sight, so's you won't have no chance to get him off, see?"

Daily still smiled. But lines of worry crossed the kindly squint of his eyes. "Well, so be it, but here comes Molly with something cool. Let's see if it won't make us better natured."

The Sheriff accepted a glass of iced tea from the gray-haired Molly Daily, with a mutter of thanks. He held the glass in one hand, pulled a package of cigarettes from his pocket, and held it out to the cattleman.

"No, thanks," said Daily, "I don't smoke."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Sheriff Levine. "Been punchin' dogies for fifty years, and

still too nice to smoke!" He pushed the package under Daily's nose. "Better have one," he insisted, with sarcasm. "Anybody tough enough to drink iced tea ought to smoke cigarettes. Anyway, you've got to begin sometime."

"The issue isn't a moral one, Jeff; it's a matter of financial prejudice. My faithful employees have burned up doggone near ten thousand dollars' worth of hay for me with those things; and the longer I think about it, the less likely I am to begin smokin'."

"And now listen,"—there was a new quality in Daily's voice, and his face was serious,—"I want to talk to you about the Kid. And"—as the Sheriff moved impatiently—"you listen!"

Jeff Levine recognized the new quality and merely stared at the cattleman. But his expression said plainly that no argument or persuasion would change matters in the least.

"The Kid," began Daily, "came out here a few years ago from way down East, looking for a job. He ran smack into Joe Mattalee, and Joe, being a first class horse-thief, didn't look like one at all. Joe gave him a job and took him into the Bad-lands in the night. Why doggonit, Jeff, the Kid didn't even find the way out until long after he found he was punching stolen dogies and playing flunky for the worst gang this country ever saw. He—"

"Sounds nice," said the Sheriff. "We'll now listen to the story of the innocent boy in bad company—but meanwhile time's getting on, and my rifle is going to talk now. Let's cut this short and go."

"He wanted to get away then," Daily's voice was patient but a trifle hopeless. "They told him they'd fill him with lead and sink him in the Little Missouri if he tried. And if he did get away, they'd see that the law knew where to find him. So he didn't try."

"I know he didn't. He just stuck around to steal many a little dogie, and do the dirty—"

"No, he didn't, Jeff. He never stole a thing, and he did no dirty work aside from herding whatever cattle they happened to have on hand. And then one day I was coming through the Bad-lands so thirsty I could spit cotton, and the crazy horse I had fell over a skunk and began to sunfish. The cinch broke, I came down on a rock and battered up one knee so I couldn't walk. Now the Kid sat up on a hill and took the whole thing in. He knew who I was and he knew if he showed himself I'd be likely to shoot first and talk with him afterward, but he took the risk. He came an' caught my horse and helped me straddle him."

"So one of the Mattalee gang became a friend of yours, and you'd like to save him from me an' the law."

"Jeff, I talked with him a long while. I talked with him several times. You're right when you say he's been here. Not only that; I loaned him a little money, enough to start a place on the other side of the mountains and to pay the way for a girl who's been waiting back East for him to get rich in the cattle business. He's hitting out tonight, and you can take my word for it when I say he'll never come back here or do wrong out there. I'm asking you, just for old times' sake, to let him go. He's a good boy and I'll take the responsibility."

JEFF LEVINE got to his feet. "Now it's your turn to listen. There was nine in that gang at the start. I shot four of 'em. I got two in the pen. Unofficial-like, I helped hang two more—one of them is hangin' yet for all I know—this Kid is the last of the gang, and all the talking you can do in the next ten years aint goin' to stop me from collectin' his scalp today. Now get your horse, because we're hittin' the trail, and you're leadin' me to his hide-out or take the consequences yourself."

There was no smile on the face of Daily now. He knew he dealt with a man as heartless as stone, and a man who depended for reelection on his rec-

ord as an exterminator of gangs. The cattleman got slowly to his feet. "All right, Jeff. The law is on your side. I guess maybe I gotta go."

IT was late afternoon in the Bad-lands. A cañon wound between peaks and buttes like an erratic gash in a layer-cake, its walls seamed in the hues of lignite and colored clays, its upper slopes breaking into peaks splashed blood-red with scoria.

The floor of the cañon, barren and white with alkali in places, covered with grass and trees in scattered clumps, was cut by a winding water course. Near a spring coming from a lignite vein, where the cañon turned so sharply that it appeared to end in a solid wall of clay, a log cabin stood under the trees. There nature had thrown a screen of thorn-apples around a sheltered glade. From a rusty pipe in the dirt roof a thin wisp of smoke rose to drift away on a strong hot wind.

Shadows reached out from the western wall and the gloom of early evening hung under the trees, but out on the alkali where the sun still struck, a blinding light shot through with heat-waves made patches of dazzling brilliance dimmed only by puffs of powdery alkali raised and hurried on by the wind.

In the shadows, cottontails pattered about in the underbrush, and a bobcat lay stretched along a limb, his yellow eyes swelling and dimming to pin-points as the rabbits approached or moved away. Out on the alkali, red-winged grasshoppers crackled dryly and the wind set up a harsh drone through the ribs and shredded membranes of a dead antelope. Then, on a slope, a white-tailed buck started at the sound of horses from down the cañon, and leaped in long aerial arcs to the shelter of a clump of cottonwoods.

Along the cañon came two horsemen, the Sheriff and his reluctant guide, the former riding with a shotgun across the hollow of his arm and peering ahead as one hunting the biggest game of all, the latter stern and silent, his forty-five driven hard into its holster, and the troubled look on his kindly old face deepening with every turn of the trail.

"Listen, Jeff, we're doggone near the shack. It's just beyond that clump of trees. Can't we fix it some way so you won't likely do something you and I'll be sorry for as long as we live? Can't we think up some—"



The Sheriff's laugh was as harsh as ever, his face as unbending as the trunks of petrified trees strewn over the cañon floor. "Tryin' to bribe me, eh? I thought you posed as an old saint instead of a crook. I—" The Sheriff's voice broke off sharply, for he had caught the gaze of the cattleman and now that too was cold, as cold as the muzzle of blued steel that peeped from the bottom of his shoulder-holster.

"That's enough, Jeff! Take it easy now. I know you brag about being the best rifle-shot in the country and I believe it's true, but if I lose my temper you'll be against a proposition too fast even for you." For an instant the older man's hand hovered above the pearl grip of the forty-five. Then it dropped to the pommel of his saddle. His face softened and his voice was pleading again. "Jeff, I wasn't thinking of bribery. I was thinking that the Cattleman's Association pays these rewards to peace officers as well as to anyone else, and if you'd let me pay the reward I'll do it if you'll be satisfied to arrest this youngster and let me take my chances of getting him off with a suspended sentence."

Daily sighed as he finished. He knew there was no use in pleading with the ivory-headed minion of the law. The killer in Jeff Levine was uppermost. The satisfaction of saying he had shot down the last of a dangerous gang was more to him than any consideration of justice or of friendship, and he would get the reward in either case. Bill Daily said no more, but now the dejected look on his face had been supplanted by the alertness of a man who sees an approaching crisis, his sharp gaze sweeping every foot of the scene ahead. Seeing the wisp

of smoke, his jaw set hard. And then suddenly he checked his horse. Leaning over, he grasped the Sheriff's arm and pointed into a clump of trees ahead. "There," he whispered, excitement in every note. "Look! Right in those trees!"

Jeff Levine's gaze followed the pointing finger. He saw a shadowy form under the cottonwoods. It moved. Throwing up the rifle, he fired.

The shadow in the trees sagged forward and down. There came the sound of snapping twigs, of something struggling on the ground, and silence. Then the two men were afoot, hurrying toward the trees.

Forcing their way through a tangle of underbrush, they reached the cottonwoods and at their feet lay the white-tailed buck, very still in death. And now the elation in Daily's voice was a genuine compliment to the marksmanship of the Sheriff.

"Jeff," the older man cried, "you're a ring-tailed wonder. You drilled him right through the gullet at over two hundred yards!"

Momentarily the Sheriff's pride in his marksmanship overcame his chagrin. But his expression changed suddenly as a new sound came from the direction of the shack. It was a thrumming sound. Both recognized it as the hoofs of a horse racing over hard clay.

"You dodderin' old fool," roared Levine, "you fooled me and gave us away."

At that the fine lines thickened in the corners of Daily's eyes. "Doggone," he said blandly, "do you suppose I did?" Then the lines faded, and he returned the stare of the furious officer with the innocent gaze of a child.

"Come on," roared Levine, "we've still got the fastest horses in the country—and I can drop that young devil out of his saddle at half a mile."

THERE was some delay in reaching their horses. Daily became entangled in a wild-cucumber vine, and extricated himself with difficulty. Then the furious Sheriff himself blundered into a washout hidden by underbrush and was forced to roar repeatedly before Daily heard and came to the rescue. But once mounted, their progress was better, although the impatient and now thoroughly suspicious Sheriff curtly ordered his guide to ride ahead and be "damn' careful about any more monkey-work."

The cabin door stood open, and there were signs of a hasty evacuation.

Daily was inclined to make a thorough search.

"Let's go in, Jeff, and make an investigation," he urged.

"Investigation be damned," gritted the Sheriff.

"But listen, Jeff, we might find a clue."

"Clue!" roared Levine. "What'n hell do we need a clue for?" Levine was in a dangerous mood. "Tryin' to make more delay, eh? Get out of there and get goin'."

Daily obeyed.

AS they swung away along the cañon, the crinkle that had become almost a smile in the eyes of the cattleman, smoothed out again. Himself mounted on the fastest horse in the country, Levine on a horse second only to his, and the fugitive on a horse decidedly inferior to either, presented a new problem. The Kid was not safe by any means. The start he had might prove only a reprieve. As they swept around a bend of the cañon to see a ribbon of dust ahead, and as the Sheriff raised that deadly rifle, waiting for a chance to shoot, the last of the elation in Daily's eyes dimmed. The Kid was still in mortal danger, and from here the cañon led, enclosed in walls unscalable by a horse, directly to the benchlands above the Little Missouri. The chances now were all in favor of the Sheriff. The face of Bill Daily was lined deeply indeed, but these were not the lines of humor.

Far ahead, the fugitive appeared only for a moment before a shoulder of the cañon wall reached out to hide him. Levine fired, but it was a long shot, and anyway, Daily's horse, apparently dodging the stump of a petrified tree, ran against the Sheriff's mount. The soft-nosed projectile whined on ahead, and a white plume burst from the clay high above the fleeing man. The officer swore, but Daily's face was innocent of guile as the pursuers raced on, side by side.

The reason the fugitive had not made better progress was obvious. The water-course wound from side to side, crossable only at irregular intervals. The officer was on strange ground, and the old cattleman seemed equally at a loss. So their greater speed was not the advantage the Sheriff had imagined. When the cañon afforded another view, they had gained but little, and their prey, riding low over his horse's neck, escaped again although it was Daily's turn to utter an



"Now, you thievin' son-of-a-gun, let's see how much lead you can carry!"

exclamation as he judged the two bullets must have passed on either side of the Kid, with a very narrow margin to spare.

"Next time I'll get him," cried Levine, and evidently the older man feared the truth of the statement, for his face was drawn and gray.

But now the cañon became a more tortuous thing, turning and bending like a snake. At the next turn there was nothing in sight.

Daily was ahead now, partly because he had the fastest horse, and partly because Levine would not trust the cattleman in his rear. But the older man seemed at a loss as to his course, and finally the Sheriff lost patience. "Get t' hell out of the way, you old fool, and let me finish this business." Daily pulled slowly to one side, and the officer urged his horse ahead. But the cattleman's horse held his ground after that, running easily, with his nose at the leader's flank.

Another turn brought a cry of triumph from the Sheriff. The cañon straightened out. They were looking through a giant rifle-sight into the valley of the Little Missouri. Here of course, the marksman

ship of Jeff Levine would end the race. They had gained too, and the range was not so long. The killer raised the rifle again, and the shot echoed harshly through the cañon. The fugitive dropped suddenly from sight as if the missile had literally mowed both horse and rider flat. But when the pursuers burst from the cañon out on the benchland, they found a steep hill dropping away into a thin band of timber along the river. And again the Sheriff gave a cry of triumph. "Got him now—he's run himself right into a trap!"

IT appeared that Levine was right. The river, forming a horseshoe bend, came from under a steep bank at their left and returned to another on their right. Neither man nor beast could pass at either hand, and any attempt would bring the Kid in easy rifle-range. Ahead they could see the sand-willows swaying as the fugitive forced his horse out to the sandbar, and while there was a ford in the apex of the point, it also lay within easy range of the Sheriff's rifle, and beyond, a barren sandbar, wholly unpro-

tected. Levine dropped from his horse and knelt on the brow of the hill. He chuckled harshly.

"Now, you thievin' son-of-a-gun, let's see how much lead you can carry!" he muttered.

Daily also dismounted. Fixing his gaze on the swaying willows, he watched in gray-faced fascination as the Kid rode slowly but surely to certain death. He heard the metallic click of a cartridge snapped into the rifle. . . . He watched Levine raise the rifle and rest an elbow across his knee. Another ten seconds and it would be over, for Daily knew the deadly marksmanship of Jeff Levine too well to feel the slightest hope. Then suddenly he knelt behind the Sheriff, a glint in the gray eyes, his jaw set, his voice metallic above the roar of the wind: "I guess you got him Jeff, that's a fact."

"Damned right I got him! There aint a chance for your young friend now."

"No, I guess not. Let's have a cigarette." Reaching forward, he took the package from Levine's vest. Placing a cigarette in his mouth, he scratched a match on his spur shank and deliberately threw the sputtering flame into the thick grass behind the motionless Sheriff.

The wind whipped hard at both men and Levine sat down, the better to steady his aim.

The willows swayed now, out to the very edge. He raised the rifle and drew the sights down fine. His finger closed slowly. Then, with a startled yell, he

sprang to his feet. The rifle discharged, and a hawk soaring overhead dodged as the bullet whistled past. Wheeling, Levine saw that the prairie had literally exploded under him. He looked down into a mass of curling flame. Even before he could leap aside, it had singed the fringe of his chaps, and a puff of acrid smoke stood him in stead of one eyebrow.

Levine jerked off his hat and beat at the swirling flames. Then he threw away the hat and pulled off his vest. Daily had torn a slicker from behind his saddle, and was coming as fast as he could. But in that wind and in that grass, the fire roared up and out like gunpowder. Nothing could stop it, and no man might face it for an instant. It spread so rapidly that Levine nearly lost his rifle before he could retrieve it from the path of the flames. Then, as the wind veered from side to side, the whole top of the hill burst into flame, while the head-fire roared over the brow, turning the brush and timber into an inferno.

At that, Levine's mind returned to the fugitive. Leaping aside to shoot past the fire, he raised the rifle again. But now billowing waves of yellow smoke reached out toward the river. He caught a glimpse of the Kid, and fired without stopping to aim. There was no second shot. The valley was filled with smoke.

Wheeling on Bill Daily, the Sheriff burst into a roar of profanity. "You crazy old fool!" he roared. "Some more of your work. I got a good notion to—"

The cattleman stood tall and straight, the wind tossing his iron-gray locks, his kindly eyes as guileless as a child's, the lines forming again around them. In his hand he held the unlighted cigarette. "Sorry, Jeff." His voice became plaintive. "Doggone it, I hope you don't tell the boys on me. I've lectured them a lot about playing with matches on the prairie."

"Hell!" bellowed Levine. "You told me you never smoked."

"That's a fact too," acknowledged Daily, "that's a fact, danged if it aint, but I was kind o' nervous and upset and I figured—anyway you told me yourself I'd gotta begin sometime." He broke off then, his gaze fixed across the river, a gentle smile on the fine old face.

High in the notch on Rifle-sight Butte, a figure appeared. A hat waved against the sky, and the evening sun struck fire from the silver star on a gauntlet. Then a cloud of smoke rolled up and into the pass. When it cleared, the Kid was gone.



T W O S H O R T N O V E L S

THE CORONER'S TALE

A murder-mystery by the author of "Scarlet Fingers" —

By THOMAS DUNCAN



CHEESE-BOX ON A RAFT

Secret weapons of another war clash in decisive battle—and a lady triumphs.

By RICHARD MATTHEWS HALLET

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



"I heard a shot," he said. . . . "And I came none too soon, either!"

THE CORONER'S TALE

By THOMAS DUNCAN

Who wrote "The Fun Farm Murder."

NONE of us, I suppose, ever expected him to die peacefully in bed. He was different from other men. Strange fires burned in his eyes, and perhaps in his soul too; and I doubt if we would have been very much surprised if some day on Main Street he had vanished in a puff of smoke and never come back again.

Well, he didn't vanish in flame, but he didn't quietly expire in bed, either. The last time I saw him he was lying dead, violently dead. That was last month, in October.

He will become a legend in Forge Hill. Already there are exaggerations. More than ever now people are avoiding his strange, drafty house in the timber east of town. Only the crows remain there now, circling above their rookeries at dusk, and filling the murky air with their harsh caws. The blood of the year runs chill and thin; the first sleety storm of winter is ghosting tonight from hilltop to hilltop. I shall set down the facts about Fletcher Saracen while they are bright in my memory....

It was a night of wind, with ragged clouds racing across the witch's moon, when Ed Humboldt and Sheriff Hank Woodruff clumped into my office and told me that Fletcher Saracen had been murdered. I had been coroner nearly a year, but this was my first homicide.

The wind was blowing eleven bongs from the courthouse clock when Humboldt and Woodruff came in. I tossed down the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and asked:

"What's wrong?"

Sheriff Woodruff was a great red-faced man with cold eyes behind steel-rimmed glasses.

"Ed'll tell you," he said. "I haven't been there yet."

Ed Humboldt, our night watchman, looked excited. He was a grizzled little fighting cock, as sassy and talkative as a sparrow.

"It's Fletcher Saracen," he yapped. "He's been killed dead. Murdered."

"Where?"

"In the Opery House. He's not only been killed, but killed bad. All bunged up! I was making my rounds, and the Opery House door was unlocked. Found him in the office. On the floor. I hot-footed it right for Hank's, and we come here."

Calhoun's Opera House had been unused for years; it was the only bad investment, I think, that my Uncle Sherm Calhoun ever made.

Shrugging into my topcoat, I asked:

"What on earth was Saracen doing in the Opera House?"

Ed Humboldt sucked on his badly fitting false teeth and started to speak, but the Sheriff's heavy voice cut in:

"We don't know," he said, shooting Humboldt a significant glance. "We're going into this thing, and when we get some evidence, we'll start drawing conclusions. But not until."

"I've drawed my own conclusions already," Humboldt snapped acidly.

The little watchman looked knowing and triumphant, and I wondered what he knew—or thought he knew—that the Sheriff didn't want told....

Outside, Main Street was abandoned, except for the dust and débris that the wind was hurling past lonely street-lamps. High in the sky, behind illusively motionless clouds, the small moon went riding like some celestial horseman destined never to reach his goal.

We passed the fly-specked windows of Hogan's Café, where a few loafers were settling the woes of the world, and turned

east on Trade Street. Beyond a string of rickety buildings and a vacant lot, Calhoun's Opera House stood at the edge of the business district. It was a long one-story building that my Uncle Sherm had built in 1912.

I snapped on my flashlight, and we entered the foyer.

Dust and cobwebs were everywhere. Till 1930, Sherm had presented movies there, and then talking-pictures came along. He hadn't cared to sink a lot of money in new equipment, and so the Opera House went dark.

Bringing out his own flashlight, Humboldt led us into the office.

"Saracen won't fool people no more," he said. "If he was such a good magician, you'd think he could come back to life."

Saracen had once made Humboldt the butt of a trick, and the sour little watchman had never forgiven him.

When Sheriff Woodruff caught sight of the corpse, he went a little pale.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "That's not murder—that's butchery!"

I HAD seen Fletcher Saracen first in the spring of 1914, when he and his pretty young wife trouped into Forge Hill with a lot of big theatrical trunks and presented an evening of magic at my uncle's Opera House.

He was then about thirty-eight, a man of medium height with a shock of black hair. He had burning black eyes, too, and his muscular body was inclined toward chunkiness. But he had none of the lethargy of a softly fat man. That chunkiness generated volts of energy. You could feel it crackling from him in waves.

He had been booked into Forge Hill for one night only, but he remained twenty-five years. For after his performance he became violently ill, and they called old Doc Griggs to his hotel room. Abdominal pains had bent Saracen double.

A modern doctor would have suspected appendicitis, but Doc had only one remedy for any twinge in the digestive tract—castor oil. If the patient pulled through, Doc took the credit; if not, Doc took a slug of whisky to forget.

Saracen's ailment must have been simply gastritis, for he recovered without a burst appendix. But he rested in bed several days. By the time he was up, he had already missed several performances in towns beyond Forge Hill; the season

was nearly over, anyway; and so he canceled his remaining dates in order to rest.

That excited us kids. It was the highest honor ever bestowed on Forge Hill, we thought, having a magician at the Nonpareil Hotel. We used to hang around outside; and when we glimpsed him leaving the lobby with his wife, we'd urge: "Do us a trick, Mr. Saracen."

I can see them now, back there in my memory, Saracen and his pretty wife Golda. She was about twenty-three, a blonde woman with a Lillian Russell figure. She was utterly lovely. They'd pause, smiling, and he'd ask, "What kind of trick?" Then before we could reply, he'd produce an orange from the tip of Bobby Rothrock's nose, or a fan of playing-cards from behind David Buchanan's ear.

His hands were beautiful to watch, like a pianist's—tapering fingers, the nails beautifully tended—the fine hands of an artist or a surgeon. On the third finger of his right hand he wore a curious ring; and he told us—with a kidding smile—that it was responsible for his wonders. A Hindu fakir had given it to him, so he said.

It was a heavy signet-like ring, but on its face, instead of initials, there was embossed a serpent with its tail in its mouth.

"In the Orient," he would explain, "that is the symbol of life. A charmed circle that can be broken but never understood. So long as I wear this ring I am invulnerable."

Then with a laugh he'd swing around and stroll off with his beautiful wife.

To us boys, those two represented all the high romance of the world beyond the sky-rim. He always wore a gray tweed suit with a hound's-tooth check; and Golda Saracen shocked the local housewives with that daring new fashion, the split skirt. It was thrilling to watch her skirt as she walked, splitting up her shapely calf to reveal a bright glimpse of green underskirt.

They lingered on in Forge Hill for a week, two weeks. The way they gazed at each other, you could tell that she worshiped his vigorous masculinity, and that he was mad about her smooth glamour. People saw them leaving town together on sunny spring afternoons for long strolls in the country, and occasionally some farmer caught them kissing amid wild crabapple blossoms.

And then the Forge Hill *Clarion* published the astonishing news that Saracen

THE CORONER'S TALE

and his wife had purchased the old Southwick house in the timber east of town.

"Mr. Saracen tells us," said the *Clarion*, "that he intends remodeling the house and making this his headquarters during the summer slack in the theatrical business. He will also establish a workshop there, to invent new magical effects. He informs us that he and Mrs. Saracen have been searching for an ideal summer location, and that they have grown so fond of our town that they have decided to settle here. We welcome them to Forge Hill, and wish them continued success."

In June, Saracen and Golda moved from the hotel to their home, but they never went troup ing again.

That was the summer when Pandora's box flew open, and the furies that have tormented us ever since swarmed out. During those years of war and years of sick peace, Golda and Fletcher Saracen lived on in Forge Hill. His hair grew iron-gray there, and the sneak-thief years pilfered her beauty. And the carefree-dom of that first springtime left them. Sometimes for months you wouldn't see her in town, and when he strode in for groceries he was tense. Occasionally they boarded an eastbound train and were gone for weeks at a time, nobody knew where. After twenty-five years in a community where everyone knew everybody's business, Golda and Fletcher Saracen remained as secretive and mysterious as they had been when they first troup ed into town. . . .

I wish I didn't have to tell you how the corpse looked, there on the floor of the Opera House office. The crime was brutal, and I'll spare you all I can.

As Sheriff Woodruff had said, it was butchery. The weapon lay in plain sight on the floor, a wide-bladed cleaver such as is standard bone-chopping equipment in any butcher-shop. The murderer had wielded the blunt end to beat in his victim's skull; and then, as if in sheer hate, he had smashed it several times into the dead man's face, messing up the features. You can imagine how the place looked.

But there is one thing you cannot imagine:

Remember Saracen's ring? The Hindu serpent-ring? It wasn't there. But that was not all.

I was profoundly shocked and puzzled when, glancing along the dead man's right arm, I beheld what the cleaver had

done. Halfway between the wrist and elbow, it had chopped through the coat-sleeve and shirt-sleeve and the arm itself. All that remained was a bloody stump.

I remembered how beautifully nimble Saracen's hands had been, vanishing a card, snatching a coin from thin air. Feeling a trifle squeamish, I straightened up. I could hear the wind screaming through town, and it was horrible to think that somebody in Forge Hill was capable of such a crime.

Sheriff Woodruff muttered: "Why would they do that, Doc? Why would they cut off Saracen's hand?"

"That's easy," Ed Humboldt yapped. "They must have wanted his ring."

"Then why didn't they just take it?"

"Because it was too tight to come off, that's why. I know. I was in Greenwood's drugstore this evening when Saracen came in with Sherm Calhoun."

The Sheriff cleared his throat. "Now, Ed—"

Humboldt turned on him like a terrier yapping at a big St. Bernard.

"It's no use, Sheriff. Even if Sherm is Doc's uncle, I've got to have my say. Everything adds up to the fact that Sherm Calhoun killed Saracen; and if Doc does his duty as coroner, he'll have to admit it."

I wanted to drive my fist into Ed Humboldt's face, but the utter ridiculousness of his charge restrained me. My Uncle Sherm would have been as likely to commit murder as to try winning a flagpole-sitting contest.



SHERMAN CALHOUN had been more a father than an uncle to me. He was in his late sixties now, a white-haired man with a spare body and a lean face. Some people—his debtors, especially—thought that his keen gray eyes were cold and shrewd; but I had seen those eyes in their gentler moods.

Until I was six, he had seemed a rather awesome man, distant and taciturn and stern. He always came to our house for Sunday dinner, because he was a bachelor living alone. My father—his brother—was several years younger than Sherm, but he seemed a generation younger. I doubt if Sherm ever was young in spirit.

From his mother's people he inherited the sharp instincts of a Yankee trader; he was a born money-maker—and a money-saver. At twenty, he owned his own grocery and meat-market. At twenty-six, he was a director in the Forge Hill Trust and Savings Bank. He helped my father through medical school, and years later he helped me through.

ONE afternoon when I was six, a knock fell upon the schoolroom door; and when Miss Crandall opened it, I caught a glimpse of Uncle Sherm. Miss Crandall spent several minutes in the corridor; and when she returned, she came down the aisle and paused by my desk.

"Billy," she said, "you may be excused. Your Uncle Sherm wants to see you."

It was all very queer and obscure; and as I trudged along the aisle, some premonition of disaster made my legs feel hollow. Uncle Sherm's narrow face was dry and bleak; he took my hand and led me out into the bright spring day. I kept asking what was wrong.

In the schoolyard he paused, gazing at nothing.

"You know Bess and Nellie," he said.

Of course I knew Bess and Nellie; they were my father's team of mares.

Sherm took a deep breath, and still avoiding my gaze, he told me:

"This afternoon your father was driving Bess and Nellie on a call to the country. Your mother was with him. He stopped at the railroad track to let Number 7 go by, but Bess and Nellie got skittish and plunged onto the track. Number 7 hit the buggy. . . . Guess you'll be living with me from now on, Billy."

It took a moment for my stunned mind to grasp it. Then I began to cry. And through my grief a kind of terror flashed—terror at living with this severe man who had never been young.

He looked at me; and my terror left. For those shrewd gray eyes were different, suddenly. They possessed a compassionate gentleness that I had never seen in them before.

"Don't cry," he said. "I feel like it myself, but the Calhouns don't cry."

That was the part of Sherm Calhoun which the town never knew. In business he might be flinty, a driver of hard bargains, but deep inside he was gentle and good. . . .

So Sherm and I batched it in his unpretentious little house on Grant Street.

He bought me a coaster wagon, and later a bicycle; and in March he used to go out with me to fly kites. He always invented some elaborate reason for going, such as to see that I stayed out of mischief, but he enjoyed those expeditions. I think that through me he was compensating for the fun he had missed in his boyhood.

Sherm had the reputation for being a stingy man, but with me he was never a tightwad. When I told him I wanted to study medicine, he never batted an eye at the expensive prospect of eight college years.

"Glad to hear you want to follow in your dad's footsteps," he said.

On the night before I left to enroll at the University, we sat up late talking.

"It'll be lonesome here," he said, "without you around the house. But that's all right. You're young. I don't need to tell you to study hard, because you're naturally a worker. But have some fun too. A man's youth is gone soon; and it never comes back. Might be a good idea to fall in love with some actress and send her roses every day. Or to sow a few wild oats and damp 'em down with champagne. Course, it's your life and you'll have to live it as you see fit, but when a man's old, he ought to have a few memories to live on."

And then, after a few moments of thought, he added very typically:

"But I wouldn't sow too wild a crop, if I was you. Go at it conservatively."

I didn't, as it happened, shower rose-petals on any actress; but during my junior year in medical school I fell in love with Sally Fielding. When I told Sherm, he asked:

"Want to marry her?"

I said yes.

"Then what's stopping you? Can't two live as cheap as one?"

So with Sherm's financial aid I married, and after college he built us a house in Forge Hill. When a son came along, Sherm always referred to the child as his grandson. Yes, Sherm had been a father to me, and Sheriff Woodruff knew it. That was why he had tried to prevent Ed Humboldt from running off at the mouth with that silly accusation.

And that was why I wanted to slug Humboldt. Instead, I snapped:

"Don't be a fool. Sherm wouldn't kill a flea, and you know it."

"Can't tell what any man'll do till he does it," the watchman shrilled. "Take a look at that."

THE CORONER'S TALE

He dipped down and picked up the meat-cleaver.

"Hey—wait!" I yelled. "There'll be fingerprints—"

But already Humboldt was pawing the handle. He looked a little foolish and muttered:

"Shucks, I didn't think of that."

He was very dumb—or maybe very smart. I remembered how he had hated Saracen, and through my brain ghosted a suspicion that perhaps he wanted to handle that cleaver, just in case his fingerprints were already etched upon it.

He said: "Look at them letters. You've seen 'em before, aint you?"

Neatly painted on the handle were three white letters—*Cal*. Everyone in town knew that they were the abbreviation of "*Calhoun*," and that it was Sherm's cautious habit to mark his possessions with that identification. As a boy, the rake and lawn-mower I had wielded were so marked; and all the collapsible delivery-boxes from his grocery bore that brand.

I snorted: "Sure. If Sherm wanted to kill someone with a meat-cleaver, he'd be very apt to go to his meat department and get one with a nice identification. He'd leave it by the body, too, so we'd know who did it."

The Sheriff said: "Ed's just talking because he likes to hear himself. Sherm wouldn't have killed Saracen."

Humboldt's face looked as if he had bitten into a sour apple. He replaced the cleaver on the floor and leaned over the dead body. From a vest pocket he plucked out an *Excelsior* cigar.

"I was in old Greenwood's drugstore about seven-thirty this evening," he said. "Saracen and Sherm came in together. Saracen bought three of these. He gave one to Sherm and lit one himself. I remember it plain—just as he put this one in his pocket, he told Sherm he wouldn't sell him that ring."

The Sheriff asked: "Sherm tried to buy his ring?"

"The one with the snake on it," Humboldt said. "Saracen held up his right hand and twisted it around so the light hit the ring. And he said: 'No, Mr. Calhoun, I wouldn't sell this ring for any amount. It's too valuable to me.' And then he said: 'Besides, it's got too small for my finger. I'd have to chop off my finger to get it off.'"

"What did Sherm say?"

"Nothing. You know how Sherm is—he just looked down his nose. And then

Saracen said: 'Well, Mr. Calhoun, shall we be getting on to the Opera House?' And Sherm said, 'Reckon so,' and they left."

I snapped: "I'm sick of this. If you want to accuse Sherm, you'd better do it to his face so he can answer."

Humboldt grinned thinly over his false teeth, but his watery little eyes glinted. And I was remembering how several years before, Sherm had told me that Humboldt owed the Calhoun Grocery and Market more than a hundred dollars on account. I wondered if he had ever paid it up.

The Sheriff cleared his throat, spoke hesitantly:

"Understand, Doc, I don't believe any evil of Sherm. But it kinda does put me in a place where maybe I ought to question him. He and the magician were in the drugstore together, an' they was on their way here. And Sherm tried to buy that ring, and we find Saracen killed and his whole right hand gone and that meat-cleaver a-laying here. Understand, I'm not saying that Sherm did it—"

I said: "I want to examine this body further. You call Pete McKenzie and have him bring his hearse here. Then we'll go to Sherm's house and get his side of the story."

But just then, through the perpetual moan of the wind, a clatter sounded from the Opera House auditorium, as if a pile of lumber had been dropped.

I ducked out of the office.



GREEN velvet curtains, fading toward mustard-yellow, dangled from brass rings in the doorway leading from the foyer to the auditorium. Flicking them aside, I followed the darting flashlight beam into the auditorium. The place was thick with the past. Here, as an urchin, I had seen Saracen's magic show, and "Lena Rivers," and Chief Kickapoo's Medicine Show.

Striding toward the stage, I swept the flashlight over the ranks of folding-chairs, but I saw nobody. I could hear Woodruff and Humboldt in the aisle behind me, and the wind was crying in the chimneys that led down to the stoves.

Then, in what would have been the orchestra pit of a slanting-floor theater, the flashlight picked out a man lying flat on his back. His white hair was a barber-defying tangle, and several days' growth of stubble gleamed frostily on his bloated face. In nondescript trousers, his big round belly looked as prosperous as a capitalist's, but he was no capitalist. He was drunken old Joe Spence.

Several folding-chairs had collapsed around him; he must have clutched their uncertain aid in trying to rise from the floor. And now he was dozing audibly.

Sheriff Woodruff shook him.

"Joe! Wake up!"

"Uh?"

"Wake up, Joe! What are you doing here?"

His lips moved; his eyelids slitted back over glassy pupils, then closed; and he sighed deeply.

"Go 'way. I'm an old man. Worked hard all my life. Wakin' me up this time o' night. Oughta be ashamed."

"Joe, listen to me. Fletcher Saracen's dead."

"Uh? Saracen? Yep," he mumbled, "that'll happen. People'll die. One thing you can always depend on. People'll die."

"Saracen was murdered. Did you kill him?"

He yawned to an elbow, blinking against the white flashlight rays.

"I did, huh? What'd I do that for?"

"I didn't say you did. I asked you."

Joe Spence thumbed his jaw. "Thought you must be mistook. No—I didn't kill him. Why should I? Besides, it's too fur to walk, out to his place."

"He wasn't killed at home. He was killed here."

"Here? Is that so!" Joe groped out for his shapeless hat, perched it upon his head, and swayed to his feet. "Sheriff, my advice to you is—just forget it. Them things'll happen—but best way is ignore them. . . . Well, boys, we got a big day's work tomorrow. The old woman's got three washings to do. It's a caution how dirty people get their clothes. Think I best be gettin' along—"

Sheriff Woodruff grabbed his biceps.

"How'd you get in here, Joe?"

"Under my own power, Sheriff. Just walked in the back door."

"The back door!"

"Sure. It was open. Thought I'd get out o' the wind. That's a frisky wind, if you ask me. Chilly, too. I was comin' along the alley from the pool-hall, and

thought I'd take a short-cut through the weeds back of here. Uh—this is the Opery House, aint it?"

"That's right, Joe."

"Right, Sheriff! Just want to keep things straight. So, as I say, I started to cut through the weeds, and the old moon was just sailin' behind a cloud-bank. An' I heard the back door open, an' saw Saracen come out into a patch of moonlight and then jump back just as the moon went out."

"You saw—who?"

SPENCE belched and blinked. "Who'd I say?"

"You said Saracen. He's dead, Joe. He's been murdered. His corpse is in the office—"

"Uh—won't dispute you there, Sheriff. But I didn't kill him. Understand that, I hope. Between ourselves, I'm drunk. An' when I'm drunk, I'm good-natured. Too good-natured to kill anybody."

Ed Humboldt shrilled: "It must have been Sherm Calhoun you saw, Joe."

"Calhoun—" Joe Spence meditated. "Sherm Calhoun. Known him all my life. Fine man. Most people are, matter of fact. Take my oldest son, the one in the pen. Got a heart of gold; he mighta stole a few chickens, but hell, his heart's in the right place. . . . What was we talkin' about?"

"You were cutting through the weeds," the Sheriff prompted.

"Was I? Guess I was. An' I saw this man jump back out o' the moonlight—"

"Can't you remember who it was?"

Spence shrugged. "Mighta been you, Sheriff; mighta been Ed; mighta been me. Only, it couldn't have been me, on account of I couldn't see myself a rod away. Who was that other fellow you mentioned?"

"Sherm Calhoun."

"That's the name. Anyhow, the moon went out just as I seen him. An' I called out: 'It's kinda breezy, aint it?' Whoever it was didn't answer. I thought he'd gone back in the Opery House. So I come to the back door, an' it was swaying. So I come in. Like to fell down them stage steps. By that time I was sleepy, so I laid down here. Woke up, after while, an' tried to get up, but all them chairs fell over. Then you shined that light in my eyes an' woke me up. Said I'd killed Sherm Calhoun. That's no way to talk, Sheriff."

"I didn't say you'd killed Calhoun. I asked if you'd killed Saracen."

THE CORONER'S TALE

"Saracen? He's that magician, aint he?"

"That's right."

"Wouldn't fool around with no magician. He'd just soon pull a rabbit out o' your coat as look at you. Bet he's got more lives than a cat, Sheriff. A man kill him, and he'd haunt you. Never forget the time he let Ed Humboldt handcuff him. Well sir, he was out o' them handcuffs quicker than scat. Never forget old Ed's face!"

Spence's body shook with soft laughter. I flicked the flashlight over Ed Humboldt's face. He wasn't laughing, or even smiling. He was a man who couldn't bear to be smiled at; Saracen should never have selected him as the butt of that handcuff escape.

"Get that light out of my eyes," he snapped at me. And then to Woodruff he said: "It's my advice, Sheriff, to lock Joe up for the night. He saw Calhoun leaving here, and he'll be an important witness."

I said: "You mean Joe saw somebody leaving who might have been Sherm Calhoun—or anybody else. Joe's too drunk to identify anybody. Aren't you, Joe?"

"Could have sworn it was somebody," Joe mumbled. "But maybe not. It was dark out there, with the moon hidin'. Maybe it was a shadow."

He took a deep breath and blew between loose lips. His heavy-lidded eyes sagged shut. He was drunk, all right, but I had the curious feeling that he wasn't as drunk as he pretended....

Supporting Joe between them, Woodruff and Ed Humboldt left the Opera House. They would return in a few minutes with Pete McKenzie, the undertaker; and meanwhile I had some time to myself. I didn't return immediately to the Opera House office. Using Humboldt's flashlight, I turned toward the stage.

The proscenium arch was of thin wood, and at left-stage a few steps ascended from the auditorium to a door leading behind scenes. Back there tonight everything was cobwebs and dust. In constructing the stage, my uncle had followed the old Opera House tradition, rather than modern theatrical plans. The stage ceiling was low, with all the curtains rolling up from the bottom; and since the Opera House had no basement, the two dressing-rooms opened off the upstage corners, rather than being situated beneath the stage.

It was all very shabby and old-fashioned, with a threadbare rug covering the creaky stage boards. I glanced into each cramped dressing-room—one was for men, one for women; but they looked as if they hadn't been disturbed since Saracen had played there. As Joe Spence had reported, the door at left-stage which led outside was ajar. It had a snap lock, and somebody had thumbed up the little catch. The murderer, it seemed, had taken pains to leave both back and front doors unlocked, as if he were eager for the crime to be discovered.

I stepped out into the wind. In the flashlight rays, the vacant lot was a messy wilderness of tin cans and ashes and swaying weed-stalks. As the light danced over the faint path, I glimpsed something at the edge of the weeds:

A jackknife. It was old, with a black wooden handle, and I had seen it many times before. It belonged to Sherm Calhoun. Neatly cut into the handle were the letters "*Cal.*"

As I lifted the knife, I was surprised to find a silver dime clinging to its under side. I flicked the knife, but the dime remained. Pulling it loose, I saw why.

A tiny wad of something red and sticky had been pressed against the head of the lady on the dime. It wasn't blood. It was more like a pinhead of red chewing-gum, but it wasn't as sticky as gum. I couldn't figure it. I pressed the dime against the knife again, and it remained there, neatly and lightly.

Bringing out my handkerchief, I wrapped the knife and the dime in it, and dropped the bundle into my pocket. Then I returned to the office.

ANYTHING save a perfunctory autopsy seemed unnecessary. I went through the suit-pockets, but all I found was a half-empty package of cigarettes and some matches. No keys, no wallet—the murderer must have robbed him too. I directed my attention to the stump of the right arm. And suddenly I felt like a nit-wit. For a question flashed through my brain which, in the excitement, hadn't occurred to me before. Where was that severed hand?

The meat-cleaver had chopped clear through the forearm; and the lower portion of both the shirt-sleeve and suit-sleeve lay soggy on the floor. But the right hand was missing.

It would have been ludicrous if it hadn't been so gruesome, my searching that office for a dead hand, as if it were

a recalcitrant collar-button. I peered into the corners, and beneath the roll-top desk. But no hand did I find.

I went into the foyer, flashing the light over the floor for some trace of blood. There was none. In carrying that hand away, the murderer must have had it well wrapped. But why had he carried it away? If he had wanted Saracen's ring, why hadn't he simply severed the finger, if Humboldt's report were true—that the ring was too tight to come off?

And I asked myself if anyone would actually have killed Saracen just for that ring. As a boy, I had swallowed whole Saracen's story about its being a present from a Hindu fakir, but now I remembered how the magician had smiled when he said it. Part of his patter, doubtless. The chances were that it was a very ordinary ring he had picked up in some pawnshop.

In the office again, I leaned over the corpse to examine further the marks of those head and face blows. And from those dead lips there came an odor which I had smelled a few minutes before on Joe Spence—stale alcohol.

AND that was odd indeed, for in life Saracen had been a teetotaler. It seemed queer that a man so worldly in other ways would refuse to touch a drop, but he always did refuse. I remembered how, three years ago in August, he had come to my office to have his left foot treated. It was a most unromantic ailment troubling that colorful man—an ingrown toenail. I was forced to do a little cutting, and with the idea of steadyng his nerves, I offered him a drink of excellent peach brandy.

"I never drink," he said almost curtly.

Never, I said lightly, was a long, long time; and I added:

"Life's a rigorous experience. It can be very painful—and sometimes it can be very dull. It's surprising how a drink can smooth out the rough spots."

I'll never forget how he looked, sitting there with his naked foot outstretched. His chunky body was still as vigorous as it had been years before—the chunkiness of muscles rather than fat. Perhaps working in the open out at his country place was responsible for the steely strength of his sinews.

But the years had worked subtle changes in his face. Its planes had become crasser and its features had coarsened. His mouth with its full red lips had widened toward the ugliness of

a frog's mouth. His black hair, as I remembered it, used to be silky, but now it had the iron-gray texture of furniture stuffing. And in his dark eyes there were fiery depths that I wouldn't have cared to explore.

One corner of his mouth curled in a crooked smile.

"I've never found life dull," he told me. "It can be maddening—horrible—but never dull."

As he uttered the word "*horrible*," I discerned yet another change in the man. I had the feeling that a door had flashed open and slammed shut, giving me a swift glimpse of his soul. And his soul was a wild, lonely country, like a gale-swept moor.

Then, as if to erase that impression, he turned on his charm. For a minute he was like the Saracen of that halcyon April in 1914.

"Don't misunderstand," he said. "Life's worth living. It can be glorious. That's why I wear this ring—to remind me how precious it is."

And he glanced fondly down at the ring with its serpent.

Half-seriously I said: "You used to tell us that ring gave you strange powers. It doesn't, does it?"

He glanced up quickly, then threw back his head and laughed.

"I'm surprised at you, Doctor—you, a scientist—asking such a question. No, my power comes from here." His finger touched his forehead. "But there's one trick with this ring that's excellent. The best trick of all."

"Let's see it."

"Not today. Sometime, perhaps. It's a strenuous trick, but very good."

So we returned our attention to his toenail, and after that when he came to my office, we never discussed his ring. And now tonight the ring had vanished.

Through the wind I heard footsteps in the foyer; it was Sheriff Woodruff.

"I called Pete McKenzie," he said. "He'll be here with his hearse."

"Where's Ed Humboldt?"

The Sheriff smiled apologetically. "Ed's got a one-track mind. He gets an idea, and it won't leave. He's gone to your uncle's house to get him and bring him here."

"Good. Sherm will be able to explain everything. He wouldn't have killed Saracen."

"Course not. Never did think so. And now I know it. Look what I found on Joe Spence when I searched him."

THE CORONER'S TALE

From his pocket he brought a wallet. Inside, I counted seven dollars in currency, and the identification-card bore Fletcher Saracen's name.

"You think that Joe—"

"Sure. Joe was drunk, and he killed Saracen. That's all there is to it. Course, he won't admit it. Says he don't remember. But a jury will convict him."

"Did Joe have any blood on his clothes?"

"N-no—don't think so."

"How about Saracen's ring?"

"Didn't find it on Joe."

"How did this meat-cleaver get here?"

The Sheriff pushed back his hat, took a deep breath.

"Damn it, Doc—why do you want to mention all that? Joe had the wallet. Aint that enough?"

"I'm no lawyer, but I don't think so. You'd better call Gene Murphy."

Eugene Murphy was our county attorney.

"Murphy's out of town—at that lawyers' convention. Be gone for two days yet."

I said: "Joe's drunk. He couldn't have pulled a messy job like this without smearing himself with blood."

Very low and soberly the Sheriff said:

"If I was you, I wouldn't find so much fault. If Joe didn't do it, that leaves your Uncle Sherm—"

"Right," I cut in. "Sherm, and Ed Humboldt, and you and me and everybody else in town. This case is wide open. I think there's a lot more to it than we've imagined."

The Sheriff froze up.

"All right—if you know so much about it, why don't you go ahead and solve it?"

"I think that's what I'll try to do."

It occurred to me—and I wondered if it had occurred to him—that in our State the coroner is the only county officer empowered to arrest the Sheriff.

when he saw the corpse a stream of cheerful profanity left his mouth.

"Who did it?" he asked finally.

I only shrugged, but the Sheriff said: "Looks like it was Joe Spence. I've got him locked up."

"Spence! Well I'll be damned." Then with a long laugh that rose from deep in his belly, he chuckled my ribs and said: "Thought you was the only guy in town I could depend on to bring me business, Doc."

It was a grisly affair, getting the corpse into the hearse, but it didn't faze Pete. He kept whistling, "Over the Rainbow." At last he slammed the back door of the hearse and with a wave climbed behind the wheel. Through a break in the flying clouds, the moon sent down icy rays that gleamed on the hearse as it rumbled away.

Wordlessly, the Sheriff and I tramped back into the Opera House. I went to the stage and locked the back door while he poked around in the office. The sound of the wind was continuous, like a roaring waterfall. Returning through the auditorium, I paused in the foyer door. I could see the Sheriff in the office, gazing at the meat-cleaver, which he gripped in one big paw. He lifted it suddenly, and slashed it down against an imaginary target. He was probably trying to reconstruct the crime.

Then Ed Humboldt trotted in from the street. He was panting, and a thin smile played over his lips.

"Aint there," he shrilled. "Can't find him."

The Sheriff jumped; I stepped into the foyer.

"Who isn't where?"

"Your Uncle Sherm. I banged his front door and yelled under his window. He aint at home."

"So what?"

"I don't blame you," Ed Humboldt yapped. "I'd try to protect him too, if he was my kin. But it looks like he's skipped."

"It's no crime not to be at home."

"No—but it's a crime t' kill a man with a meat-ax. That's a crime, sure enough."

"You ought to know."

Humboldt bristled like a wire-haired terrier. "Meaning what?"

"Meaning you're a peace officer, and that you should know what's a crime." And I added: "Sherm's probably at the grocery."

"He aint there, neither. I come by there, and it's dark."

CHAPTER FOUR

IT was a dreary sight, Pete McKenzie's hearse backed up to the Opera House curb on that October midnight.

A round, ruddy man, Pete looked as if nature had intended him to be a bartender rather than an undertaker. With his son Bert, he came into the foyer; and

"He'll turn up. Don't worry about Sherm."

"I aint worried *about* him. I'm worried about *findin'* him."

I snapped: "That's your job. Mine was examining the body, and I've done that."

I strode to the street; from the door the Sheriff called:

"Hey, Doc. Don't flare up mad."

"I'm not mad—just disgusted."

Which was true; but I was troubled as well. I wanted to check up on Sherm's whereabouts myself; I wanted to think.

The wind flapped my topcoat about my knees and tried to snatch off my hat as I tramped along the deserted business district. Even Hogan's Café was dark now. In my office, I took up the telephone and called Sherm's house, but long ringing brought no response. So I called my own home.

When I told my wife what had happened at the Opera House, she said:

"That's strange. Mrs. Saracen has been trying to reach you. She's called twice."

"What did she want?"

"She's sick. She left word for you to go out there as soon as you got in."

Golda Saracen was subject to violent headaches, and it occurred to me that she probably didn't yet know about the affair at the Opera House.

I asked: "Has Sherm been at our house this evening, Sally?"

"No, he hasn't—why?"

"I just wondered. . . . Well, I'll chase on out to the Saracens'."

But before leaving the office, I called Ben Greenwood, the druggist. Drowsily he corroborated Ed Humboldt's account of how Saracen and Sherm had entered the drugstore at seven-thirty that evening. And he remembered the conversation about the ring.

"Did Sherm try to buy it?" I asked.

"Guess he must have. But Saracen said it was too valuable to sell, and that it had got too tight to pull off. Said he'd have to cut off his finger if he ever got that ring off."

"You heard Sherm offer to buy it?"

"Well—no. I had the impression that they'd been talking about it before they came into the store, and that after he bought the cigars, Saracen took up the conversation where they'd left off."

"Did you hear them say they were going to the Opera House?"

"Yes."

"Who else was in the store?"

"Just our regular loafers. Ed Humboldt, and Pete McKenzie and his son, and—"

"Was Joe Spence there?"

"Yes."

"Drunk?"

"Don't think so—but he wasn't sober, either. You know old Joe—he aint been clear sober since Taft was President."

I thanked him and hung up. Procuring my medicine-case, I went to my parked car, but instead of driving immediately to the Saracens', I left the case in the car and walked up Main Street.

Sherm's grocery and market was a big prosperous store at the corner of Elm and Main streets. I rattled the front door, but it was securely locked. Through the plate glass, I could discern the white gleam of the meat-market scales, and on the other side of the store, at the back, a night bulb burning above the iron safe and Sherm's desk. Everything looked orderly.

Rounding the corner, I walked along Elm Street and cut into the lot behind the store. The flashlight guided me among packing-boxes and barrels to the rear entrance. It was a solid door, without glass, and it too was locked.

Returning to my car, I drove to Sherm's house. It was black, and the wind lashed the bushes clumped around the porch. I still carried my latchkey from the time when I used to live there.

I don't know what I expected to find there—perhaps a note from Sherm, or Sherm himself sleeping, or Sherm dead.

The living-room, the dining-room, the kitchen—all were in perfect order. Upstairs, Sherm's bed was neatly unslept-in. Two empty grips stood in his closet; the dresser-drawers were undisturbed. If he had fled Forge Hill, it was without even a clean shirt and a toothbrush.

I locked the house and started for the Saracens'. I was sorely troubled. My affection for Sherm was deep, and I knew what the town would think about his absence: it would share Humboldt's suspicions that he had killed Fletcher Saracen, and had then run away.

A FOOTPATH rambled through cow pastures to the timber a mile east of town, but by highway the distance was longer. I drove north from town and then turned east along an up-and-down dirt road.

It was lonely, out there in the country. Every roadside weed and tree was reeling

THE CORONER'S TALE

in the wind, and my sedan staggered along like a roisterer. Cresting a hill, I could see the countryside rolling away for miles in all directions. It had a turbulent look, like the sea; for in a dozen places there were swift cloud-shadows sailing across the moon-brightened sweeps.

At a fork I turned into the timber road. Narrow, with weeds growing down the middle, it wandered across Crawfish Creek on a rickety bridge and wound up a hill. A hundred years before, Indians had camped in that rough timber-land; and when I was a boy, we used to hike out there to play Jesse James and swim in the creek. On either side of the road native trees towered, and underbrush marched right down to the ditches. Halfway up the hill I turned in at the Saracens'.

The house stood back from the road, the type of wooden castle with turrets and gingerbread that our grandfathers liked. Old Pawl Southwick had built it back in the '80's, as a refuge from the world. He had pioneered that country and grown rich, but about the time their third daughter was born, his wife had gone queer. And one by one, his daughters went queer also.

So poor old Pawl built the house and moved out into the timber with his household of four moon-struck women. The girls were beautiful, more's the pity. On our forays into the timber we boys avoided the house, but sometimes we would chance upon one of those stately girls roaming alone, talking to the trees.

Pawl Southwick survived his wife, but not his daughters. After his death, the trustees of his estate sent them to a sanatorium, and the house stood empty and for sale. Fletcher Saracen was able to purchase it for a fraction of its value; and as I halted my car there tonight I wondered if he too, like old Pawl Southwick, had desired a refuge.

When I switched off the motor, the noise of the wind in the treetops buried me. And when I got out and slammed the car door, I heard the crows.

That timber was full of crows. For years they had maintained their rookeries there, venturing forth by day to plunder farmers' seed corn. Tonight a crew of those black pirates had been roosting in the high trees near the house, and they must have suspected that the slamming door was a gunshot.

Up from the heaving branches they rose, their wings flapping in the wind.

And they all started cawing bloody murder. Mounting the veranda steps, I saw them wheeling across the cloud-dimmed moon, their curses drifting back fainter and fainter as they fled.

"**I** THOUGHT you were never coming," Golda Saracen said.

She was holding a kerosene lamp high. I stepped over the threshold into a narrow hall and slammed the door on the pandemonium outside. Our shadows accompanied us enormously as she ushered me along that hall, past doors opening on vacant, high-ceiled rooms. She was wearing a rich indigo kimono decorated with a golden dragon.

The large room we entered had a lived-in air that made it seem cozy by contrast with the rest of the dwelling. Pieces of magician's equipment gleamed on top of low bookcases, and in a brick fireplace cheerful flames were crackling. Mrs. Saracen set the lamp on the table and lay down on the davenport.

"Fletcher's gone," she said, in her low, beautifully modulated voice. "He's been gone all evening. I thought I'd go mad here alone—with the pain—"

"It's your head?"

She nodded, lying there with a forearm flung across her eyes. Her fingers were clenched. I remembered how lovely she had been that first April; and even now, in the soft lamplight, she was lovely still. But it was the autumnal loveliness of decay. Her figure now was like one of those ripe womanly figures that Renoir liked to paint.

She murmured: "Sherm Calhoun is your uncle—"

"Yes."

"Then maybe you can tell me what he wanted with Fletcher. He wanted him to go to his house this evening. And they were going to the Opera House. He said he wanted advice from Fletcher. Do you know what it was?"

"No."

"He's been gone so long," she said plaintively.

Just then I couldn't break the news, so I asked about her head—how long had it ached—how violent was the pain?

The worst she had ever experienced, she answered. And her nerves were torturing her. Suddenly she said:

"Sometimes I think I'm psychic. Fletcher laughs at that. He's such an earthy man. But do you know tonight I have a sense of—of disaster. Maybe it's my head. It's splitting."

I opened my case and prepared the hypodermic. After administering it, I put my palm on her perspiring forehead.

"You're going to sleep," I said. "You need sleep—strength. Perhaps you are psychic. At least your intuition of disaster is correct."

Her wide eyes gazed up at me. "It's—something about Fletcher?"

I said: "We found him in the Opera House. He was dead."

A few minutes before, she would have screamed, I think. Now, her breathing speeded up and tears swam into her eyes. Then she smiled faintly and shook her head. "He'll never die," she whispered. "He's too—great a man." Her body relaxed, and she turned her head drowsily.

"April," she murmured, "is such a lovely month, Doctor. Too lovely to last. . . . And May. . . . We were mad in those days. . . . He always took what he wanted from life. There were such dreadful obstacles, but he shoved them aside. He has his terrible side, you know. Ruthless—"

She slept. Maybe she was back there now, I thought, strolling through an afternoon heavy with spring fragrance. Kissing amid white blossoms. The world hadn't yet gone mad in those days. . . .

I moved about the room. At the book-cases I inspected the magical vases and bowls, then glanced over the books. Most of them dealt with magic. One volume lay on top of the rows, and I pulled it out. It fell open where a blank card had been inserted as a book-mark; one sentence had been underscored. "No one knows better than a conjurer," it said, "the weakness of circumstantial evidence, for on circumstantial evidence nine-tenths of his illusions are based."

My thoughts were to return to that sentence and toy with it, but now I browsed further. On the bottom shelf two big scrapbooks caught my attention. Their pages, stiff with paste, were filled with newspaper clippings about Saracen. I drew a chair up to the fireplace and started to read.



ACCORDING to a handwritten notation, the first yellowed clipping came from the Rivermore *Advertiser*.

Dated in June, 1890, it described—of all things—an ice-cream sociable, held on a lawn in Rivermore, Indiana. The final paragraph said:

The evening's entertainment was provided by Fritz Gottchalk, fourteen-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Gottchalk. Fritz has become interested in performing magic tricks, and with his younger brother and sister, Frank and Lucy, as his capable assistants, he gave a twenty-minute show that really baffled your editor. Fritz is to be complimented upon his dexterity.

In the *Advertiser*, during the next few years, other notices appeared. Fritz Gottchalk had entertained at a friend's birthday party, at a lodge supper, at a school party. I wondered what Fritz Gottchalk had to do with Fletcher Saracen. That was cleared up by a clipping dated 1895. Beneath a sanguine headline, "Local Boy Forging Ahead," this appeared:

Friends of Fritz Gottchalk will be glad to learn that since graduating from high school here last year he has been making rapid strides in his ambition to become a sleight-of-hand artist. The *Advertiser* office has been favored by a visit from Frank Gottchalk, who showed us a letter received from Fritz in New York.

Fritz has recently accepted a position as assistant stage manager with Philip Caxton, the well-known magician. Mr. Caxton became interested in Fritz when the local boy visited the star in his dressing-room and performed some of his tricks.

In his letter Fritz states that an Oriental tour is planned for the near future, and that at Mr. Caxton's suggestion he has taken the stage name of Fletcher Saracen. Your editor joins Fritz's many friends in wishing him further success.

After that for a number of pages the scrapbook was filled with press notices of the Caxton show. It journeyed to San Francisco and thence to the Orient. The tour lasted a couple of years.

Back in America, in 1899, pneumonia killed Philip Caxton in Salt Lake City. "The dean of American magicians"—that was what the many newspaper clippings termed him. But what interested me most was the announcement that the Caxton show would continue on the road, with Saracen taking his place.

Saracen took his place off-stage also. For in the summer of 1901 a theatrical

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trade-paper chronicled his marriage to Caxton's widow, Flossie. In the clipping, one-column cuts of the bride and groom appeared side by side.

He was then a wide-browed young man with black hair goose-greased from a part in the middle; he looked sober and intense and a little wet behind the ears.

Flossie was a thin-faced woman with a sharp nose and an ungenerous mouth, and unless the photographer had done her dirt, she was forty to his twenty-five or -six. . . .

With those nuptial tidings, the first scrapbook ended. As if a phase of Saracen's life had ended too. Well, the lad who a dozen years before had given exhibitions of magic at ice-cream sociables had done pretty well by himself.

BETWEEN the first and second scrapbooks, was a lapse of eight years. Possibly Saracen had neglected snipping and pasting during that time, but more likely another scrapbook existed somewhere, which I hadn't found. In any case, the scrapbook biography resumed with 1909 clippings; in the 1909-1910 season "Fletcher Saracen and Company" had been booked for forty weeks on the Princess Vaudeville Circuit.

After that came contract troubles. From a theatrical trade-paper numerous items were devoted to a battle between the Princess Circuit and Saracen. It seemed his 1909-1910 contract had contained a paragraph that he had overlooked in signing; the Princess people had an option on his services for another season at the same salary. He wanted more. It was a tangled snarl, never settled, for instead of untangling it, Saracen had simply sailed to South America with his troupe.

And then, after all those years, another item from the Rivermore *Advertiser*, dated 1912, turned up in the scrapbook.

"Word has been received here," it said, "of a misfortune which recently overtook Fletcher Saracen, the magician, better known to old-time residents of Rivermore as Fritz Gottchalk. While he was touring South America, Mr. Saracen's ship struck a reef and sank, carrying to the bottom much of his baggage and valuable equipment. Unfortunately, the loss was not covered by insurance. No lives, however, were lost. Our sympathy goes out to Mr. Saracen, and we trust he will soon recoup his fortunes."

But evidently he didn't, very fast. For when the 1913 clippings came along, they

were from American small-town papers rather than metropolitan dailies. I could imagine the reason—that old feud with the Princess circuit. Very probably, branded as a contract-breaker, Saracen had found himself ostracized by city theaters. So he toured the sticks.

The weekly editors jumped off the deep end in their praise for his show. About the trick which climaxed his performance, they were especially excited.

The *Tribune*, published in Mallard City—our neighboring county seat—described it this way:

The last trick on Mr. Saracen's program was the most mysterious that your editor has ever witnessed. With sleeves rolled back, Mr. Saracen took a knife from a tray which his pretty assistant brought him. Placing his right hand on the tray, he grasped the knife in his left hand and deliberately cut through his right arm, halfway between the wrist and elbow. His assistant carried that hand away on the tray, and Saracen lifted the stump of his right arm for all to see.

Then he entered a cabinet at center-stage. His assistant closed the door. The floor of the cabinet stood a foot above the stage, so the audience could see beneath it. Commanding a change to take place, the assistant fired a pistol and opened the cabinet door.

Instead of Saracen, a woman stepped out, and the audience could see that the cabinet was empty. And at that moment, with a laugh, Saracen came marching down the aisle from the rear of the theater with his right hand completely restored.

That puzzled me deeply. For I had seen Saracen's show in Forge Hill, and I was positive that no such spectacular trick adorned his program. Why had he performed it in Mallard City and not in Forge Hill?

Another clipping dealt with that trick, but it lacked the awe exhibited by country editors. It came from a chatter-column in a theatrical paper:

Understand that Fletcher Saracen is knocking 'em over in the hinterland with an effect whereby he slices off his right paw and restores it. Well, well! That wouldn't be a variation of the old burned-and-restored handkerchief trick, would it, Fletch?

What was the burned-and-restored handkerchief? And why at the end of his life should Saracen's hand be miss-

ing, as if death itself were conspiring in a magic act?

Returning to the bookcase, I searched for a possible third scrapbook which would fill in Saracen's activities from 1901 to 1909, but I found none. Perhaps during those blank years Flossie had died, or perhaps he had wearied of a woman so much older and had divorced her and married Golda.

On the davenport, Golda was sleeping serenely. As I took her pulse, I wished there might have been a hospital in Forge Hill where I could have taken her, but as yet my desire for a hospital was only an improbable dream. Some day, somehow, I was going to build one, even if only a small one; I had often expounded my ambition to Sherm.

As I put down her hand, she stirred, mumbled: "Darling, don't worry. . . . There's always your ring."

Saracen's ring!

I said sharply: "Yes, Golda, the ring. What about it?"

In her sleep she sighed—a long, infinitely troubled sigh—and whispered: "We've each other. The dead—are dead forever."

I straightened up. And suddenly, there in that room with the dying fire and humming lamp, I experienced a sense of uneasiness, even of danger.

I tossed a glance over my shoulder. Nothing. Sharply, I scrutinized the room. And I saw a door that I had noticed only casually before. It evidently led to inner rooms, and in the doorway motionless curtains hung to the floor.

DO human beings emit an aura, electric waves of personality? I don't know. I know only that I sensed a presence behind those curtains—somebody listening, watching. All at once I felt that ever since I had arrived, somebody had been lurking there.

I went to my topcoat, slipped out the flashlight, stepped toward the door. Suddenly I hesitated, as if invisible hands were shoving me to a halt, and I wished I had a gun. Nonsense! I marched to the curtains, flipped them apart.

The flashlight illuminated the shadows of a big room. A workbench ran along the wall, laden with tools and cans of paint and half-finished boxes and frames. There were heaps of excelsior, stacks of packing-boxes and huge trunks. Vaguely I recalled that Saracen was an inventor and builder of magical equipment; this was his workshop.

But what drove those thoughts from my brain was the returning sense of somebody or something there. Or that somebody had just been there, leaving warm traces of his personality hanging in the chill air. Another door led to the corridor—that long corridor along which Golda had conducted me from the front of the house. The door was ajar.

I strode across the workshop and emerged to the empty corridor. My flashlight beam dashed toward the front door. Nobody. I flicked it back to guide me into a great empty living-room at the end of the corridor. No furniture occupied that room; the hardwood floors were bare. Two glass doors enclosed a vestibule leading to a side veranda, and a curving walnut staircase mounted to the upper floors.

MY flashlight beam shot up the steps to a landing and a stained-glass window; the stairs curved upward out of sight. From somewhere in the upper reaches of the dwelling a door banged.

I took the steps two at a time. . . .

That upper corridor was a sad place. Years of neglect had stained the walls, and in places the paper had loosened from the ceiling and dangled in strips like stalactites. Naked of carpet, the floor clattered faintly beneath the *tap-tap* of my tiptoeing.

All the bedrooms confronted me with closed doors. I opened one. And I saw a chamber that looked as if it had been unused for decades—uncarpeted, unfurnished, the air a-glisten with a veritable network of spiderwebs. Evidently the Saracens had never intended to furnish and use more than a fraction of this great house.

Then I heard it again—a door banging. I jumped back across the threshold and flicked my torch down the hall.

It was the farthest bedroom door which was swinging. As I strode toward it, it banged shut again and recoiled open. Ghostly! For a second I remembered Pawl Southwick's daughters, long since dead in the sanatorium, and at that mad, windy hour it did not seem unlikely that they would wander back from eternity to what had been their earthly refuge. But it was nothing so dramatic as ghostly fingers which kept swinging that door against its imperfect catch; it was the wind.

For the putty had dried and shriveled along the many panes of the bedroom windows, and currents of air leaked in

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from the uproarious night. But what interested me most in that drafty room was the fact that it was furnished.

An unmade bed occupied it, a chiffonier, a rocking-chair. Rag rugs dotted the floor. Against the wall stood a theatrical trunk, big, old, battered. It was locked. On one end two initials were painted, nearly obliterated by time—"F.G." *Fritz Gottchalk?* This, I thought, must have been Saracen's first trunk, dating back to the days before he met Caxton and changed his name.

The chiffonier drawers were empty, but on top of the chiffonier gleamed a phalanx of bottles: Liquor bottles—gin, brandy, whisky. Several were half full, and in others only a trace of fluid remained. By the bed, within easy reach of anybody who might have lain there, a bottle nearly full of whisky stood on the floor, and a tumbler.

Saracen had not used alcohol. At least, he had once rather brusquely refused a drink in my office. But now it occurred to me that perhaps he had been a solitary drinker, retiring to this room for his bouts. Perhaps he feared to drink companionably lest his tongue betray some magical secret—or some secret even more precious. But what?

And then I thought of another possibility: Golda. Often for weeks or months you wouldn't see her in town. Perhaps it was she who retired here and sailed away to the never-never land.

I hefted the locked trunk, judging it to be perhaps half-full, and with the idea of searching for keys, I left the bedroom and returned to the stairs. Descending, I had the feeling that something had altered during my absence.

Something had.

THE curtains were pulled apart in the doorway to the room where I had left Golda Saracen; and now, looming before the fireplace, I saw Sheriff Hank Woodruff. In his big paw he held his .38, pointed at the doorway as I entered.

"Hank!" I said. "What are you—"

Grimly he said: "I came out to tell Mrs. Saracen about her husband. And to ask her some questions. But I was too late."

Then I saw what he meant. On the davenport facing the hearth Golda Saracen lay as I had left her. Only she was not sleeping. A long-bladed knife—a butcher-shop knife—had been slid between her ribs, into her heart. On the handle were painted the letters—*Cal*.

CHAPTER SIX

NEXT afternoon I left the inquest at McKenzie's undertaking establishment and drove away in my car toward Mallard City. The coroner's jury had returned a verdict stating that Golda and Fletcher Saracen had been murdered by a person or persons unknown.

But the town didn't believe that the murderer was unknown. The town thought it very well knew the murderer—Sherm Calhoun. That meat-cleaver and the butcher-knife were quite enough evidence for the town.

In his grocery and market Serm employed three clerks and a butcher, but the possibility that any of them might have been implicated was irrefutably precluded by airtight alibis.

Nor was there any question but that the cleaver and knife had come from Serm's grocery. I had wondered if perhaps the murderer had secured a cleaver and knife elsewhere and painted "Cal" on their handles, but such was not the case. The butcher identified those weapons. They had been hanging above the meat-block when he quit work the night before, and they were missing when he reported for work the following morning.

Who but Serm, people asked, could have procured them from the store? There was no evidence that the store had been unlawfully entered—no broken locks, no smashed glass.

Well, I might have, for one—although I hadn't. I carried a key to Serm's store. And Ed Humboldt might have. As watchman, he possessed a key. And he had hated Fletcher Saracen.

It was during the first European war that Humboldt began despising Saracen—in 1918. The local Red Cross had held a funds-raising auction in the town park, and Saracen had consented to enliven the gathering with some magic. Up to the platform he had called Humboldt, inviting the watchman to handcuff his wrists behind him. With a "He'll-never-get-loose-from-these" air, Humboldt had complied. But in a bewildering instant Saracen was free, and with a smile he dangled the locked cuffs under Humboldt's nose. The crowd roared laughing approval—but Humboldt was furious.

However, driving along toward Mallard City, I scarcely thought that Humboldt's hatred would have been bitter enough to impel him to kill the man. And certainly not to kill Golda.

Nor could Joe Spence have slain her, for when she died he was snoring in jail. Getting arrested had been a wonderful break for him. That is, if you assumed that both murders had been committed by the same person, which I did assume.

That morning I had gone to jail and talked to Joe. Something like sobriety had returned to him, and he was shaking scared. Confused, too. He said he couldn't imagine how Saracen's wallet had propelled itself into his pocket. By magic maybe, for all he knew. Blank places lay upon his memory; he couldn't even recall the Sheriff's searching him; he seemed to imply vaguely that perhaps the Sheriff hadn't found the wallet in his pocket at all; that the Sheriff, eager to nab a suspect—any suspect—had picked up the wallet in the Opera House and had foully announced that it had been on Joe's person.

But he clung to the main points of his story. He had been fumbling homeward along the alley and had cut through the vacant lot behind the Opera House. Wind—moonlight and shadows; a man emerging from the Opera House rear door—then ducking back.

I demanded: "Who was the man?"

"It was dark," he mumbled.

"Last night you told us first that it was Saracen. Then you said it might have been the Sheriff, or Sherm—"

"Couldn't have been Saracen. He was dead. Unless it was his ghost. And I wasn't that drunk—to see ghosts. Must have been Sherm—or the Sheriff."

"You're sure it wasn't Ed Humboldt?"

"I'm not sure of anything. It was dark."

I left him, consulted the Sheriff. He had contrived his own neat theory as to how Saracen's wallet had entered Joe Spence's pocket.

"At first I thought Joe had killed Saracen and robbed him," he said, "but now I doubt it. Think Joe must have staggered into the Opera House office and seen Saracen dead. Took his wallet. Then while he was walking toward the back door, he passed out."

It wasn't much of a theory, but perhaps it was better than none.

Looming in importance above everything was Sherm Calhoun's disappearance. Since Joe Spence had beheld him

leaving the Opera House—if it were he—nobody in town had seen him. It was the Sheriff's belief—hesitantly expressed, because of his regard for my feelings—that Sherm had killed Saracen and then sneaked out to the house in the timber and slain Golda.

Why? Nobody knew. Perhaps he had gone mad. Perhaps Golda had been aware of the motive which had caused him to slay her husband, and he wanted to silence her. Why fret about motives, anyway? The magician and his wife were dead, weren't they? And Sherm was missing.

It seemed odd that Sheriff Woodruff should have arrived at the Saracens' between the moment when the knife pierced Golda's heart and I descended from upstairs. He said he had not known that I was there, till he saw my car in the yard. The front door was unlocked, and he entered, after knocking and getting no response. And he found her dead. Then he heard someone coming downstairs. It was I.

Did he suspect me? If so, he didn't mention it. Certainly I suspected him, but I didn't mention it, either. We phoned Pete McKenzie, and after a half-hour his hearse rumbled along the timber road. While we waited for McKenzie, the Sheriff made a fruitless search of the house, and I scrutinized the indexes of magic books for a trick about a burned and restored handkerchief. But after reading the description of that trick, I couldn't see any resemblance between it and Saracen's feat of carving off his hand.

McKenzie and his son arrived, carried the corpse of Golda Saracen to the hearse. I blew out the oil lamp, and with the Sheriff, left the house. But in the yard I recalled something, and with my flashlight I returned to that room where the fire had sunk to coals like glowing red eyes. I had gone back to fetch those two scrapbooks, which I had left on the table. They were missing.

MALLARD CITY was a prosperous town of five thousand, built around a courthouse square. My friend Dr. Hamilton, the coroner there, introduced me at the *Tribune* office.

I learned that the editor who had reviewed Saracen's show in 1914 had long since died, but the present editor cordially invited me to help myself to the back files of the paper.

"I'd like the issues for March and April, 1914," I told him.

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He cleared off a table, blew the dust from a big bound volume, and set it before me.

Saracen's name appeared first in a late March issue—a brief advance notice of his show. Then the following week a half-column notice was published, along with a photograph of "Fletcher Saracen and Company."

I gaped at that photograph, excitement tingling through my veins. Till that instant I had been groping blindly toward a solution of the case, and now I had discovered something that suggested new and amazing possibilities.

The photograph depicted a black-draped stage-setting, replete with gleaming magic tables. At center stage stood Saracen, wand in hand, ready to bow. He was wearing a mustache. At his right stood a blonde young woman with a glorious figure—evidently Golda.

Another woman stood at his left: A woman neither young, nor blonde, nor seductive.... I had seen those thin, sharp features before—in Saracen's scrapbook. Unmistakably, she was Flossie Caxton Saracen, his first wife.

All sorts of questions and speculations went spinning through my brain. Had Saracen jilted Flossie for Golda? And after all these years had Flossie returned, a sinister old woman, and killed Saracen and then Golda? Or perhaps the photograph had been outdated even in 1914; perhaps Flossie had not troupé into Mallard City with the show. Maybe the picture had been taken several years before 1914—perhaps to advertise that South American tour. Possibly down there below the equator Flossie had died, or been divorced. And back in the United States, short of funds, Saracen had used that old advertising cut to save money.

And how about his mustache? Did that too date back several years before 1914? Or had he worn it in Mallard City and shaved it off before coming to Forge Hill? If so, why?

I leafed through the pages to the after-notice of the show. Previously I had read it in Saracen's scrapbook, but now I scanned it more thoroughly. But although the review mentioned two women assistants, it did not give their names or describe them except to say that one was "pretty," Golda, doubtless. It was possible that the second assistant was not Flossie at all.

Saracen had played at the Rialto Theater in Mallard City; so now, ac-

companied by the *Tribune* editor, I went there. We found the manager in his office, a young man working for a company that owned a chain of small-town theaters. He had no idea who had owned the theater in 1914.

At my request he conducted me backstage and told me to look around all I pleased. It seemed a futile thing to do, inspecting the theater where Saracen had performed twenty-five years before. Although erected earlier than Calhoun's Opera House, it was newer in design.

So there on the stage, behind the screen where a singer was crooning to a matinée audience, I gazed up into the lofty flies and pondered the trick whereby Saracen had sliced off his hand. Why had he performed it here but not in Forge Hill? And why had he employed two assistants here, but Golda alone in Forge Hill?

And how could such a trick have been possible? It sounded as fantastic as that myth which rumor carried from the depths of India, the Hindu rope trick. Saracen was supposed to have entered a cabinet with his hand severed; then a revolver shot, and a woman emerging from the cabinet, while Saracen trotted laughing down the aisle. Impossible! And yet—magicians often performed feats that seemed to transcend all physical laws: Houdini, breaking through the surface of the East River, while the packing-box that had confined him was dragged up dripping, himself still roped and empty save for the handcuffs that had manacled his wrists. But Saracen was no Houdini. Still, I had seen him pluck cards from the thinnest of air, and toss coins into nothingness.

Steel steps descended to the basement beneath the stage, where dressing-room doors faced a corridor. At one end a full-length mirror reflected my image, and I could imagine Saracen pausing there to adjust his tie, or Golda slowly revolving before it as she surveyed her beauty.

It was dank down there under the stage, and the dressing-rooms were as dustily deserted as those in Calhoun's Opera House. In the old days these small-town theaters were bustling with the coming and going of third-rate roadshows, but now all their histrionics came in film-cans. I snapped on a bulb in the first dressing-room. Nothing to find here, I was thinking; but the next moment a possibility flashed through my

thoughts that set me diligently examining the room for clues.

I doubt if any dressing-rooms had ever received such painstaking scrutiny as I gave those. I spent the better part of an hour under the stage. And that labor was richly rewarded. For those rooms yielded clues that had been there unnoticed for a quarter of a century, and they simply turned the whole case topsy-turvy. I felt the way a hound must when, after cold-trailing for hours, his nose encounters in moist earth the rich warm tracks of a fox.

Leaving the theater, I drove toward Forge Hill. I couldn't yet fathom the importance of Saracen's ring, or why even the maddest murderer should chop off his victim's hand, but I had hopes of finding out.

In Forge Hill I stopped at the railroad station and dispatched an urgent telegram to the editor of the *Advertiser* in Rivermore, Indiana, requesting a reply. Then I drove to McKenzie's undertaking establishment.

Pete McKenzie, his feet cocked on the office desk, sat chewing a cold cigar. When I told him I wanted to examine the corpses again, he directed me to the back room.

Ten minutes later, returning to the office, I found him still at the desk, still chewing the cigar. Outside, the early autumn dusk was falling swiftly; already, shadows gloomed the office.

"Has anybody seen Sherm?" I asked. He hesitated. "Hadn't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"The Sheriff's gone after him. They picked him up in Penwick Junction."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, naturally when Sherm disappeared, the Sheriff phoned the State police and had his description broadcast. So this afternoon the Penwick Junction authorities phoned that they had picked him up."

I demanded: "Do you think that Sherm killed those people?"

"Well, of course it looks bad, but—" His voice trailed into the silence of the swiftly deepening shadows. He cleared his throat. "Sherm's all right," he said. "A little on the tight side, but he's okay. Good citizen. It's all a damned shame. He was so tickled, planning that hospital—"

"Hôpital!" I cut in. "What—"

His chair creaked uneasily in the shadows; his voice was chagrined. "Aint that like me, spilling the beans! Every-

one in town knew it, but you. He was waiting till the plans were all drawn up before he told you. Wanted it as a surprise."

"He's been planning a hospital?"

"Yep. Going to build one and give it to the town, with you in charge. He planned to tear down the Opera House and locate it there, and on that vacant lot next to it. Don't tell him I spilled the beans!"

In a daze I tramped to my office through the frosty dusk. Information had been tumbling in upon me pretty fast; facts lay in an uncatalogued jumble in my mind: Sherm arrested in Penwick Junction. The clues I had found in Mallard City. The amazement that had hit me when I examined one of those corpses at McKenzie's. And now, Sherm's gift of a hospital!

I called the Sheriff's office and left word with a deputy that I wanted to see Woodruff as soon as he returned.

In order to concentrate, I left my office dark and sat slumped at my desk, going over the case. From the welter of truth and half-truth and opinion and hearsay and conjecture, certain facts emerged. At least, they seemed to be facts; but I was doubting some of them.

What apparently had happened was this: Sherm and Fletcher Saracen had gone to the Opera House together—nobody knew why. Somebody had slain Saracen with a meat-cleaver and cut off his right hand. It had vanished completely. And Golda Saracen had been stabbed with a butcher-knife which, like the meat-cleaver, had come from Calhoun's market. And Sherm had fled.

The logical inference was that Sherm had killed Saracen and Golda. But we weren't dealing in logic; we were dealing with human beings. Human beings freighted with love and fear and hate. Human beings like bitter little Ed Humboldt, and drunken Joe Spence, and all the others. And to complicate things further, heaven help us, Saracen had been a magician. Dealing with a magician was like trying to ascribe a certain single color to a chameleon as it darted across shot-silk. I remembered that quotation from Saracen's library: "No one knows better than a conjurer the weakness of circumstantial evidence, for on circumstantial evidence nine-tenths of his illusions are based."

The town thought Sherm was guilty—on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

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I believed him innocent, because of my knowledge of his character and my affection for him. Yet last night I had found his knife outside the Opera House—

I snapped on the office lights and brought from my pocket that handkerchief-wrapped knife, with the dime stuck to it.

Coincidence would have had to work overtime to cause Sherm to lose his knife behind the Opera House, it seemed to me. And why was the dime stuck to it? Examining the coin, I scrutinized closely the reddish, sticky substance on the dime. I even sniffed it. It smelled like wax.

Then the phone rang. It was Sheriff Woodruff. He said:

"I've been on a wild-goose chase. Those fools in Penwick Junction ought to be in an old ladies' home. They thought they'd nabbed Sherm, but it was an old tramp they'd pinched—"

I said: "Have you eaten?"

"No. Just going home for supper."

"Meet me at Hogan's Café, and we'll grab a bite. You and I've got things to do."

"What's up?"

"A night's work," I said, and hung up.

Before leaving the office, I opened the desk drawer and pocketed a blued-steel automatic. Lack of sleep had left me jumpy, for I whirled and pulled the pistol half from my pocket when the door rattled open.

But it was only twelve-year-old Jack Larson, the station-agent's son, clutching a yellow envelope—a telegram from the editor of the Rivermore *Advertiser*. No telegram has ever excited me more.

CHAPTER SEVEN



WE passed the vacant lot and paused at the big slab of shadow that was the Opera House façade. The street was deserted: Forge Hill was eating its supper. The evening was windless, crisp; and climbing into the night-blue sky, the moon shone with the sharp brightness of quicksilver. A faint odor of bonfire smoke streaked the frosty air.

I slipped out my key-ring, buried the key-prong in the lock. Inside the foyer, I closed the door after us and snapped on my flashlight.

"Still don't see what you expect to find," the Sheriff grumbled. "We looked this place over last night—"

"Take it easy," I told him.

I shot the flashlight into the office, but nothing was there now save those bad memories from last night, and the stains on the floor. With Sheriff Woodruff behind me, I entered the auditorium, and climbed the steps to the stage.

With a sigh, the Sheriff let the spade he was lugging clang against the stage.

"I don't see," he complained, "why you wanted me to bring this."

"You'll find out."

Leaning over, I rolled back the threadbare rug covering the stage boards. As I remembered it, that stage had never been equipped with a trapdoor, and I remembered correctly. It was floored with rather wide boards of soft wood. I subjected them to close scrutiny.

The years had dulled most of the nail-heads—all except those anchoring a section of the boards at center-stage. Some of those gleamed, as if a hammer had recently struck them. And the wood surrounding some of those nails revealed fresh-looking marks, as if a prying tool had recently been employed.

I crossed to right-stage and browsed into the wings. As an urchin I had hung around constantly while the Opera House was being erected, and I remembered a narrow built-in cabinet, for tools. It was still there.

The cabinet housed an ordinary assortment of tools; with a hammer and screwdriver I returned to center-stage. I dropped to my knees, but before going to work, I muttered:

"I hate to do this."

"Why?"

"I think I know what we'll find."

The nails complained stridently; the boards groaned and threatened to split.

When the hole in the floor gaped several feet wide, I flashed the torch down into it.

It was raw earth down there, about four feet below the stage floor. Turning to the Sheriff, I exchanged the flashlight for the spade. Then I descended into the hole. It was a wretched place; spiders lived there; and it stank with the odors which always congregate in such neglected spots.

Where the earth looked recently disturbed, I began to dig, handling the spade almost tenderly, lest it gash through the earth into what I thought was buried there.

I didn't work long before there came into sight some blue-serge cloth. Part of a blue-serge suit. Then an arm, a thin chest, a head. . . .

I could hear the Sheriff muttering, as men do when gripped by emotion.

The body I exhumed was that of Sherm Calhoun.

Finally, with the Sheriff's aid, I got it out of that hole, onto the stage. I attempted to make my voice emotionless, talking of such things as *rigor mortis*; but he had been a father to me. Grains of dirt were tangled in his white hair; with gentle fingers I started brushing them out. Suddenly my vision blurred, and from deep in some vital part of me a dry sob tore itself. And the years rolled back, and it was as if I were a kid again, bewildered in the schoolyard, while Sherm was saying: "Number 7 hit the buggy. . . . Guess you'll be living with me from now on, Billy."

And then in my mind's ear I heard him saying something else: "Don't cry . . . The Calhouns don't cry."

I felt the Sheriff's hand gripping my shoulder.

"Gee, but I'm sorry, Doc," he said.

"Okay," I said. "I'm okay, now." My vision cleared, and with almost professional detachment I examined the corpse. I discovered that his death had been bloodless: he died from a lack of air in his lungs—choked to death.

The Sheriff was muttering mechanically about calling Pete McKenzie.

I shook my head. "No, We've got a lot to do, yet. I don't want anyone to know about Sherm till we're through."

He looked at me questioningly.

"First," I said, "I'm going back into that hole and dig some more."

"You think you'll find something else?"

"I'm sure of it."

Once I confronted Joe with certain facts, he readily enough made the admission I wanted to hear.

"Let's go," I said to the Sheriff. And outside the courthouse, when he strode toward his car, I said: "Walking will be better. It makes less noise."

It was a fine October night. All the roofs were silvered by the moon, and when we left the edge of town and followed the footpath east, we could see for miles across the rolling land. Little clumps of trees dotted the landscape; tiny yellow lights were burning in distant farmhouses; and down in the creek valleys white mist was rising.

The timber tonight was very different from the cool green sanctuary of summer afternoons in my boyhood, and from the uproarious place it had been the night before. Underfoot rustled the dead leaves; from overhead skeletal branches cast a network of slim inky shadows.

We approached the house from the rear. Tall and silent it rose from the weedy clearing, its clapboards sharply etched with a grotesquery of branch-shadows. High in the trees I could see the crows black in the moonlight, roosting drowsily, save for a few that flapped from limb to limb, cawing low.

By prearrangement, the Sheriff remained in the shadows while I crept toward the back of the house. He was to wait there fifteen minutes, unless he heard my gun. I slipped around to the north side of the house, away from the moon, thankful that my movements hadn't roused panic in the crows. I didn't want that; not yet.

Picturing in my imagination the floor-plan of the house, I located the windows of the room where Golda Saracen had taken me last night. They were dark; I slipped along under them toward the cellar door. But before reaching it I paused, sniffing.

Wood-smoke—a pungent wood-smoke flavoring the frosty night. . . . A fire was evidently burning in that fireplace. I returned to the windows. They were dead-black. From last night I remembered the window shades—cracked, old, dried-out things that couldn't possibly have prevented a gleam or two of fire-light from leaking out.

I lifted my flashlight close to the pane, snapped it on and immediately off. In that moment I beheld not window shades, but the gay pattern of a patch-work quilt. Somebody inside had tacked it over the window to forbid any va-

CHAPTER EIGHT

FORTY minutes later we left the Opera House and went to the county jail. Joe Spence eyed us apprehensively. He hadn't had a drink since the night before—Joe didn't class water as a liquid—and he complained about his powerful thirst. So at my suggestion the Sheriff brought from his office a bottle of whisky and Joe had some. I had a nip myself.

THE CORONER'S TALE

grant gleam from disclosing that the room was occupied.

I was enormously pleased. And enormously keyed-up. My theory of the case was being substantiated. And a keen sense of danger ran like champagne through my blood. Inside that house a murderer lurked — an extraordinarily shrewd adversary who, if caught unaware, would try to kill me. Or, if anything as suspicious as a footfall reached his ears, he might elude me.

I crept to the cellar door. It was old-fashioned, the nearly-flat type, like the outside door to a cave; and it opened on a flight of steps. I lifted it, tiptoed down to a wooden door. It was locked. Expecting that, I had obtained from the Sheriff two sets of skeleton keys that adorned his collection of lawless items.

The lock was simple enough, but exceedingly rusty. The fifth key moved the plunger, squeakily. The doorknob squeaked also, and the hinges. I took plenty of time, edging the door open.

INSIDE, I stood for a moment in utter blackness. I heard nothing except the voice of danger crying in my brain. I slipped out my flashlight.

The bright beam revealed a spider's paradise. A myriad of webs festooned the dry-rotting rafters. The floor was earthen—soft, dry, dusty. The flashlight picked out a flight of steps, and crouching, I moved toward them.

At the top landing a door confronted me. Pausing, I brought out my automatic and pocketed the flashlight. My fingers closed on the doorknob.

Unlocked! Holding my breath, I inched open the door. It swung inward upon what first appeared to be a tiny room, very meagerly lighted. But it wasn't a complete room. It was the partitioned-off corner of a larger room. The partition consisted of a stack of trunks and a stack of packing-cases, rising about seven feet toward the ceiling. From over the top of the stacks and through the narrow entrance, the dull light came.

Upon the balls of my feet I prowled through that entrance between the trunks and the wall. And the room I saw was not unfamiliar. Last night I had seen its workbench, its cans of paint and tools: Saracen's workshop.

It borrowed its dim illumination from the room adjoining—the room with the fireplace, where Golda had taken me. The curtains in the doorway were slightly parted, and trying to progress with the

padded silence of a cat I moved thither. A sound halted me—froze me.

Somebody in there had cleared his throat, casually, habitually. And I heard papers rustling.

Holding my automatic solidly, I moved on, stopping when the curtains nearly brushed my nose. . . . I peered through the curtains.

Before the cheerfully flaming hearth a man was sitting—the murderer. Upon the third finger of his right hand he wore that enormous ring—the serpent ring. Before the hearth he had set up a card-table, and upon it were heaped letters, papers—and a revolver.

I had been expecting to see this man; my investigation had pointed to him alone as the killer; misdirection, the ruses of his cabalistic art—he had employed them all; but even so, seeing him there, glancing at old letters and tossing them into the flames, was like seeing a ghost.

For the man was Fletcher Saracen.

Suddenly he stiffened. He flung up his head, and with his mane of hair and his parted nostrils he reminded me of a wild stallion.

I also heard what had startled him: The crows.

Out there in the night, the Sheriff had followed my suggestion to fling a clod up into the rookeries. And now the moment was loud with crows. Hundreds of those murky, suspicious birds flapping upward, cawing "*murder, murder, murder.*" . . . Perhaps Saracen thought of them as his sentries, warning him of danger coming. He grabbed up the revolver.

But instead of making for the door that opened onto the corridor, he strode toward the doorway behind whose curtains I was standing. Possibly he intended to gain the corridor by way of his workshop. Possibly he intended hiding behind the trunks or hurrying down the cellar steps and out into the night.

I flattened myself against the wall as the curtains simply leaped apart. And through the doorway he came striding, alert energy scintillating from him like sparks. A half-second too late, he saw me.

I said: "Stop where you are."

He stopped.

I said, "Drop your gun."

He dropped it.

"Good evening, Doctor," he said affably. "Those cursed crows," he went on, "are noisy; I was going out to shoot one." And with a blandness behind which powerful energy was pulsating, he said: "Per-

haps it's impolite to ask a guest—but what are you doing in my house?"

I said: "You needn't pretend, Saracen. I know everything."

"Everything?" His brows lifted, and he smiled. "Then perhaps you can tell me where my wife is. I returned only this evening from Chicago—to find my house empty."

I said: "Your acting days are over. You needn't keep it up. I've been beneath the Opera House stage, and I've found both bodies."

"You do not believe I've been in Chicago? But I have; I learned a new trick there. To produce a live canary from thin air. Look! My left hand is empty—front and back. Now—"

He had a powerful personality.... As he swept his left hand upward, I looked. Despite myself, I looked. He did not, of course, produce a canary. But during the moment when my gaze went where he wanted it, his wonderfully trained, wonderfully accurate right hand shot out and with a steely grip, clutched my right wrist and twisted it cruelly. The automatic discharged harmlessly into the floor. And the gun fell from my hand.

With flashing speed his wonderful hands were at my throat, pinching off my air-supply. I flailed out with my fists, but he ducked his head low between his protecting arms. I started to jab up my knee—but he knew all the answers. . . . Pain shot through my leg as he kicked my shin at the most excruciating spot.

My body was bent backward, and things began going black. I experienced the awful terror of being cut off from air. A nightmare of smothering. . . . I opened my mouth so wide that my stretched lips felt they were going to split. Air! Anything for air! And then the pain left, and I seemed to be floating, light as a cloud, through black nothingness. This was the way Sherm died, I was thinking, and probably Flossie Caxton Saracen. . . . I passed out.



BUT not for long. When I came to, Sheriff Woodruff towered like a shadowy giant with his .38 trained on Fletcher Saracen. At the Sheriff's feet lay two guns—my automatic and the

magician's revolver—and Saracen stood against the wall, his arms lifted, his leonine head flung up.

"I heard a shot," the Sheriff said. "I came in fast—and none too soon, either."

I picked up the guns, and we herded Saracen into the next room, directing him to the davenport before the fireplace. The Sheriff took out his handcuffs; and then, as if recalling how easily Saracen had freed himself from Humboldt's, returned them.

Saracen smiled faintly at this silent tribute to his skill.

"I've studied locks for years," he said. "They can't hold me."

"Guns can hold you," the Sheriff growled. "Or at least stop you if you try anything funny."

Our prisoner shrugged. "When I wish to escape, I'll escape." And he added obscurely: "I've saved the best trick of all till the end."

The Sheriff frowned. And to me Saracen said: "You have nothing on me. Yes—I choked you just now. In self-defense. You broke into my house and threatened me with a gun."

I said:

"Once there was a boy named Fritz Gottchalk. He studied magic and became a very good magician. He persuaded a great magician named Philip Caxton to hire him, and when Caxton died, he married his widow. She was older than Gottchalk—who by this time had taken the name Saracen. Twenty years older—"

"Fifteen," he snapped. "So what?"

"So—a great many things. For one, he didn't love her, and it's always dangerous to marry for any reason but love. But she had money from her first husband, and our young friend was ambitious. He stepped into Caxton's place and carried on with his show.

"Things went well for a time—and then not so well. Saracen fought with a theatrical chain and broke a contract. On a South American tour his show was wrecked and he lost nearly everything. Back in the States he found himself ostracized as a contract-breaker. He was up against it. Then he had a fine idea.

"He would organize a show and tour the sticks. And on that tour he would perform an impossible trick—a trick so good that news of it would trickle through the theatrical world. The moguls of big-time would hear of it, and they would have to forget their grudge and hire him again."

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"Saracen had a brother, Frank Gottchalk; they weren't twins, but they were almost the same height and about the same build. Their features weren't too much alike, but they weren't too different, either. Put them in identical clothes, and in identical stage make-up, and stick an identical mustache on each—and they would look a good deal alike. Not perhaps if you saw them together, but if you saw one and then a little later saw the other, you would think you were seeing the same man.

"But in one respect they were very different. Frank Gottchalk had no right hand. A childhood accident had amputated it. But this didn't deter our man Saracen. Instead, he decided to capitalize on that difference, providing thereby a sensational trick.

"And it was sensational. During most of the show, Frank Gottchalk waited behind scenes. Following some trick, Saracen stepped into the wings carrying a piece of equipment with which he had finished. The audience saw him come back on-stage—so they thought. But it wasn't Saracen. It was Frank Gottchalk.

"He was wearing a false right hand, attached to the stump of his arm with flesh-colored rubber. He put this on the tray which an assistant held, and cut it off. Then he stepped into a cabinet. It looked empty. But there must have been a secret compartment where Flossie Saracen was hidden. When the curtains were drawn, Gottchalk changed places with her. The assistant on-stage fired a pistol as the signal for Saracen, who had trotted around to the front of the theater, to come down the aisle; and when the cabinet curtains were pulled back, Flossie Saracen stepped out.

"So Saracen had performed a miracle, to the layman. But a columnist on a theatrical paper suspected it was something less than a miracle. He suggested that it must be a variation of the burned and restored handkerchief. I read about that trick, Saracen, in one of your books. It involves substituting a handkerchief of your own for the borrowed handkerchief which you pretend to burn. So I knew you must have substituted somebody else for yourself."

Saracen eyed me coldly. His ring, with its coiled serpent, gleamed in the firelight.

I said: "In those days you wore a mustache. Your brother probably didn't, in public. And probably he wore glasses and dressed very differently from you,

so that the townspeople would never suspect that he substituted for you in that trick. But when he made up for the show, he put on a mustache like yours.

"The last town where you performed that trick was Mallard City. You disbanded your show there, and sent your brother back to Rivermore. Probably he didn't know why. For each of you had private dressing-rooms in Mallard City. He must not have known that you went into Flossie Saracen's dressing-room and choked her to death."

SARACEN interjected: "That's a lie! I'd divorced her months before. She hadn't been with us since the South American tour. . . . You have guessed the essentials of that trick—but I've never killed anyone."

"But you sent your brother home from Mallard City?"

"Yes. And my second assistant, too. Girl named Harriet—Harriet Campbell. I was cutting down my show to save expense. Golda and I decided to carry on alone."

I said: "You never divorced Flossie. I don't know why. Maybe she still had some money hoarded from the old days that you wanted. And very likely she suspected that you and Golda had fallen in love. So after the show you went into her dressing-room and choked her to death."

He shook his head. "I'd divorced her, I tell you, months before. I've never seen her since."

"I know Frank Gottchalk had been in Mallard City," I told him, "because of a habit that troupers have. And I know that Flossie was there too. Because of the same habit. They both left clues."

He looked at me blankly. Then he gave a short laugh. "Impossible. There's no clue that could remain undisturbed for twenty-five years. They sweep dressing-rooms out occasionally, you know."

"A habit," I said, "that both Frank and Flossie had. On the walls of each of their dressing-rooms they had written their names, and the show they were with, and the date. So Flossie was in Mallard City—and she was still your wife. You choked her. And you put her body into a theatrical trunk. And brought it to Forge Hill and buried it under the Opera House stage. I found the skeleton tonight."

He stiffened.

"You faked being sick here," I said, "to give you an excuse not to go on with

your show. You wanted to be near that buried body. You retired here, and the word went out that Mr. and Mrs. Saracen had retired. People who knew you were all far away. They would assume that the 'Mrs. Saracen' was Flossie.

"Probably you intended to dig up Flossie's body and bury it out here. I don't know why you didn't. Maybe you lost your nerve. Maybe you were afraid somebody would catch you in the act. Maybe you couldn't bear to open the grave of the woman you'd murdered. The chances were that nobody would ever find that body in your lifetime.

"You bought this place with the money Flossie had hoarded. Caxton must have made a fortune—and his money had gone to her. . . . Life left you undisturbed for years. Then you heard the rumor that Sherm Calhoun was going to tear down the Opera House and build a hospital. You knew that body would be discovered.

"You were frantic. Insane with fear! And with your knowledge of duping audiences, you concocted a scheme. You would kill Sherm Calhoun—and make it appear that he had killed you and run away. I couldn't inherit his money and build a hospital myself, because nobody would know that he was dead.

"You sent for your brother. Probably had him get off the train at some town near here and come the rest of the way by a hired car, so that Forge Hill wouldn't know of his arrival.

"I learned all about your brother in a telegram tonight from Rivermore. He left there four days ago to come and live with you. I learned that he had no right hand, and that in these later years he had become a victim of acute alcoholism. You put his trunk in an upstairs bedroom here and gave him all he wanted to drink. And he was contented.

"Then you made an appointment with Sherm. You went into the drugstore to buy cigars—but really to establish the fact that you and Sherm were going to the Opera House together. And you made it appear that Sherm had been trying to buy your ring. That would explain a chopped-off hand; for your brother had no right hand, and it would have to appear that Sherm chopped it off.

"In the Opera House office, you choked Sherm to death and buried him under the stage. You dropped his pocket-knife in the weeds behind the Opera House to make it appear that he had left that way after killing you. You stuck a

dime onto the pocket-knife—I don't know why.

"Through the early evening darkness you sneaked along behind stores to the back door of Sherm's grocery. With your knowledge of locks you were able to open the door and slip in and steal the cleaver and a butcher-knife. You took these to the Opera House. The grocery hadn't been broken into, apparently, so everyone would think that Sherm had brought them there.

"**T**HEN you hurried out here after your brother. He was probably so drunk that it was simple to lead him to the Opera House and kill him, there. You smashed up his face a good deal, to conceal the fact that the dead man's features weren't your features. And you hacked at the stump of his hand, to make it look as if Sherm had cut off your hand for the ring.

"I suspected that the dead man wasn't you when I smelled alcohol on him—for you don't drink. Afraid liquor would loosen your tongue and you might give something away, I suppose. And this evening at McKenzie's I learned for certain that the dead man wasn't you. For I examined his left foot. His toes were normal. But I remembered your left foot from the time you had me treat that ingrown toenail. The third toe on your left foot is a hammer-toe, Saracen. The dead man's wasn't.

"After you'd killed your brother, you unlocked the front Opera House door and left by the back. As you stepped out, someone saw you. It was Joe Spence.

"He was very drunk, and you didn't know whether he had recognized you. While he came staggering through the weeds, an idea flashed into your thoughts. You'd give the town two suspects. You stepped back and in a falsetto voice told him to come in and have a drink.

"As he reeled over the threshold, you ducked down the steps from the stage and lit your flashlight. Joe followed, staggering blindly into the light. When he was nearly down the steps you doused the light and tackled him. He fell off the last step and passed out on the floor. You pulled him a few feet from the steps and planted your wallet in his pocket.

"You figured that Ed Humboldt would find the front door unlocked and discover Joe. Even if Joe had recognized you, he wouldn't dare admit it, for that would mean he was the last person who had seen you alive, and you were ap-

THE CORONER'S TALE

parently murdered in the office. Joe wouldn't remember whether he'd killed you or not. He admitted this tonight.

"So far, you hadn't had to use the butcher-knife, and that was fine. For if you had to do more killing to save your skin, you could use it. And with '*Cal*' painted on the handle, it would appear that Sherm was still a murderer at large.

"When you came home you found Golda with one of her nervous spells. Maybe she suspected what you had done, or maybe you told her—I don't know. But at any rate, she knew that you had murdered Flossie twenty-odd years ago. That must have preyed on both your minds all these years, Saracen. Even that first spring when you and she went walking there must have been somebody else with you all the time—call it Flossie's ghost, or her memory. And it must have been bad out here on winter nights. Flossie wouldn't stay buried under the Opera House stage, would she? You must have heard her voice screaming at the windows on blizzly nights."

My probing had encountered a raw nerve in Saracen, for as I talked about Flossie, his mouth hardened and his knuckles knobbed and whitened. He scowled into the dying fire.

"And the bad part about it," I went on, "was that you had never married Golda. You weren't man and wife, and if you knew any law at all, you knew that she could be made to testify against you in court. Her nerves were getting worse all the time. It must have disturbed you last night when you got home and learned she'd called my house and left word for me to come out here.

"For you didn't know whether she could be trusted to hold her tongue. Her nerves were so high-strung. But there was nothing to do but wait and see. You waited—and watched—behind those curtains in the door to your workshop.

"You saw me leafing through your scrapbooks. And when Golda began murmuring about your ring, you must have feared that she was dangerously near giving away some clue. It was then that I sensed somebody was listening and watching. While I went to my topcoat for my flashlight, you must have tiptoed away from those curtains and hid behind those trunks by the basement door.

"I roamed right through the workshop to the hall. I thought I heard someone upstairs. While I was up there, you came to Golda and thrust that knife into her heart as she slept.

"It must have been about then that the Sheriff banged the front door. So you went back to the workshop and hid behind the trunks, taking the scrapbooks with you. Maybe you went to the basement and out the cellar door."

For a few seconds the room was very quiet. The Sheriff stood with his gun trained for action. Saracen was still gazing fixedly into the fire. Finally, very low, he said:

"It was a good trick, even if it didn't pan out." And then he said: "You mentioned a dime stuck on Calhoun's pocket-knife. I didn't stick a dime—"

I brought out the handkerchief-wrapped knife, removed the dime, tossed it to him. When he saw the sticky red substance on the coin, he smiled.

"I didn't know the dime was on it. I took the knife from Calhoun and dropped it into my pocket. I'd forgotten this dime was there. It's a coin I've used in tricks. This red stuff is magician's wax. If you'd known that—"

He shrugged, lifted his right hand, gazing at the ring. His left hand flashed over to it, and his thumb-nail clicked. Then suddenly the ring went to his lips and he flung back his head, as if quaffing to the dregs a glass of wine.

I jumped over to him and grabbed his wrist. He only smiled, while watching me with half-closed eyes.

The top of the ring with its embossed serpent had lifted on concealed hinges, revealing a little square cavity. It was a ring that the cunning of the East had designed to prevent torture by enemies. A poison ring. . . . From that cavity an odor uncoiled: Prussian acid.

"A very good escape," Saracen murmured. Already his eyes were dilating and his breathing was becoming labored. "Death," he whispered. "The best trick of all, Doctor."

His breathing grew sharp, slow, horribly painful. Paralysis seized him; his countenance, sweating and contorted, took on a bluish cast.

"The best-trick-of all."

ALREADY the plans are drawn and in the spring the work will begin. We shall raze Calhoun's Opera House, and in its stead build the Sherman Calhoun Memorial Hospital. Sherm's will has been read; he left everything to me. I'm sure he would be glad to know that a hospital is to rise from that site where he died. He was a wonderful man—like a father to me, was Sherman Calhoun!



Cheese-box

Unique in history is the public duel between two new weapons of war which forms the basis of this deeply interesting story.

THE quarrel between Lieutenant Dan Greene and his friend Lieutenant Smith had, surprisingly, a woman at the bottom of it. The woman was Charlotte Breck, who was the best-looking thing in winter Washington, and the wickedest flirt, according to the best advices of the social secretaries.

Lieutenant Greene had met her at White Sulphur Springs the year before the war started, and from that moment his purpose was fixed. He was of the navy school that wasted no time in preliminaries, and he had promptly asked Charlotte Breck to marry him.

Charlotte had as promptly refused; but Lieutenant Greene, whether in war or in love, was not the man to take no for an answer. A second time, in the Ho-

tel Astor in New York, he had pressed Charlotte to relent—and a second time had retreated in good order. This time at least he had a token from her, in the shape of a little blue book by authoress Mary Windle, called "Life in Washington," which Charlotte had given him to show him the hopelessness of a poor naval lieutenant's ambition to marry one of the city's social wonders.

Life in Washington, now that the war had started, was still a mad whirl where intrigue ruled, even when the city was threatened by the sons of chivalry with capture, and death loomed as the dark sovereign of the hour. There was no telling friend from foe there, as even President Lincoln was finding out.

Chaos was everywhere, at the Treasury, at the Navy Yard, at that brown-



on a Raft

By RICHARD MATTHEWS HALLET

faced Babylon of a Willard Hotel, and at the *soirées dansantes* where marriages were made on the desperate eve of battles that never were fought, and plans for military campaigns hatched that were as idle as the marriages—and with as little foresight, Charlotte Breck said to Lieutenant Greene, when he bowed over her table in the Willard breakfast-room.

"The sea of course is safe for us," she admitted. "I know that from Lord Lyons. England, he says, is making sheep's eyes at King Cotton, but can't get in at it while our ships are on the coast."

Her father, the old-line navy man Lieutenant Warfield Breck, had told her that the frigate *Minnesota*'s broadsides could blow out of the water any timber-built ship in the world, to say nothing of that iron affair called the

Merrimac now building at the Norfolk Navy Yard, which was expected to be the destruction of the Union fleet at Hampton Roads.

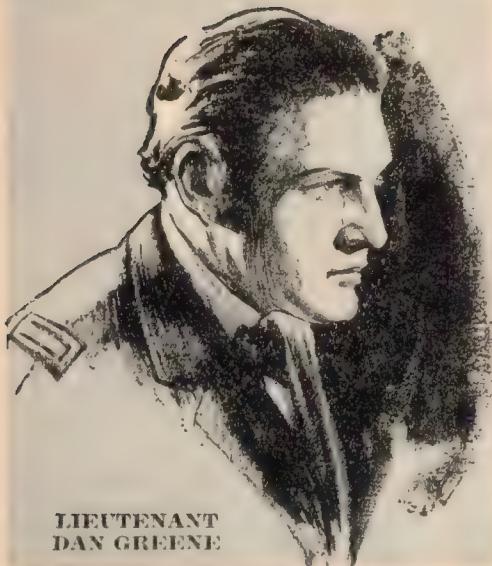
"Wooden walls are still our best protection," Charlotte said sweetly, over her coffee and Maryland biscuit.

"On the contrary! The day of wooden walls is done," Greene said, with more than his lover's touch of gloom. "The frigates will be like so many puff-balls, if that iron ram ever gets loose amongst them."

"Iron? Why, iron will sink. That's its nature," Charlotte jeered.

"It will if you can put a hole in it," young Greene agreed.

"Pshaw! Why, you should hear your friend Joe Smith ridicule that iron ram of theirs."



LIEUTENANT
DAN GREENE

"His father the old Commodore takes it more seriously," the Lieutenant retorted.

The Naval Board, of which Commodore Smith was a member, had thought enough of iron to appropriate a million and a half for experiments with iron-clads, the Lieutenant explained to Charlotte Breck. A contract had been let to Captain John Ericsson, the Swedish engineer, who had begun a warship on a new plan.

"And what does Mr. Lincoln think of Ericsson's invention?" she asked.

"He? He—thinks there's something in it," the Lieutenant said, stumbling over his words.

Charlotte's mocking laugh suggested whole reaches of sophistication, and a citadel inaccessible to a naïve young man. What Mr. Lincoln had actually and dreadfully said was: "As the girl said when she put her leg in her stocking, I think there's something in it."

Lieutenant Greene would hardly be guilty of repeating this story to a well-bred woman, but he could see that it had come to Charlotte's ears.

"Mr. Lincoln tells the most amusing stories, I hear," she murmured, sucking in her cheeks mischievously; "but we shall have to look more to General McClellan in the pinches."

Lieutenant Greene went away rejected again, and took part in the reduction of Hatteras Forts. His friend Joe Smith took part in that assault, as a lieutenant on the *Cumberland*. The two friends had the duty of landing troops in surf-

boats on a sandspit north of the forts; and after lying out all night in a cold rain, Lieutenant Greene went into his first hot action, and had a shell-splinter in his shoulder-blade to show for it.

Lieutenant Smith carried the wounded Greene on his back out of danger; and a week later their common friend, Acting Master Sam Howard of the armed bark *Amanda*, took them back to Washington, where Smith reported the battle to his father the old Commodore, who was chairman of the Naval Board.

It was at this time that Lieutenant Greene found Joe Smith to be more or less in Charlotte's toils, after one or two of those political breakfasts at the Willard. "The irrepressible conflict," Sam Howard called this rivalry between his friends. He had a more earthy view of the sex than they did—young Smith and Greene were inclined to put women on pedestals.

Joe Smith ran his fingers through his chestnut hair a bit complacently. Charlotte Breck, the day before, had given him her great-uncle's sword, a prized inheritance. This, in Joe's eyes, was tantamount to unconditional surrender.

Lieutenant Greene knew nothing of this gift of the sword, and in fact lately he thought he had seen some signs of his own suit's prospering; but unluckily he was called away to the naval rendezvous at New York.

THE three friends did not meet again until in February, when Lieutenant Greene was in Washington on an errand that had to do with the mishaps of the *Monitor's* trial trip. The place of the reunion, it turned out, was the new house of Senator Spangler.

Lieutenant Dan Greene, arriving late, looked round him with a feeling of contempt for so much luxury, at a time when men were dying on the battlefield, and everything seemed to be going to the devil. He felt a twinge of that shell-splinter in his shoulder.

The hall had a dado of oak paneling, and the rail of the broad staircase was garlanded with evergreen ropes; on his left, the drawing-room was heavily brocaded, and planted with a lot of *bric-à-brac*, Chinese eggshells, crackles, Dutch delft, Italian majolica, Wedgwood and Peruvian pottery.

On his right, the parlor was in blue and chrysanthemum tints, and the mantelpiece there was upheld by the most exquisite of caryatids.

Senator Spangler came forward and shook his hand. From the depths of a flowing black beard, which masked a lobster-tinted neck, the Senator boomed:

"You are like all the other young men: you are looking for Charlotte Breck. Battle stations, sir! Put yourself at the foot of the staircase, and you will see her soon enough."

In fact, at that instant the door to the ladies' dressing-room on the upper landing was pushed open, and a legion of angels in cashmere and velvet and blonde illusion thronged forth under the light of a cluster of wax candles in a bronze wall-bracket, then filled the staircase with an opalescent cloud of silks and feathers and jewels and bright eyes.

"There's artillery enough for the defense of Washington," the Senator said gallantly, twirling his big gold fob-chain, hung with ornaments. He had made a good thing out of the war, as his solitaire diamond cuff-buttons and studs testified. "Here comes your Breck," he chuckled. "She takes the shine off all creation, doesn't she? I hear that the very sands in her hourglass are gold."

Lieutenant Greene was willing to believe that.

"Heavens, how lovely she is!" he thought. She was in white tulle, with a blue knot at her throat. A Brazilian firefly, netted at her temple, waxed and waned like a pulse.

"You, Dan Greene!" she murmured, poking the Lieutenant with the closed ivory slats of her fan. "I thought you were at the naval rendezvous."

"I am returning tomorrow."

"You must find me after dinner and tell me about Captain Ericsson's *Monitor*," Charlotte said.

She floated past, going in the general direction of Joe Smith, whose arm she took. This was young Greene's first intimation that his friend was fishing in that pool.

He went in to supper with Katie Chase on his arm—a young woman in white satin, who had a rose held in her raven hair by an opal butterfly. Katie asked him worshipfully if he had recovered from the wound he had got in the attack on Hatteras Forts. The Lieutenant satisfied her curiosity on that head, but he was not in a mood for table-talk; and Katie, seated, turned away from him. The supper-table had been "done," Lieutenant Greene found, by the celebrated Maillard. At the other end of the board was a model of the frigate *Congress* done

in white candy, with all sail set, and the Union flag flying at the main.

Lieutenant Greene had neither eyes nor ears for his immediate neighborhood, since directly across sat Charlotte Breck, between a Turkish admiral and Lieutenant Joe Smith, of the *Congress*. The Admiral wore a turban topped with diamond vignettes and crescent, and the scimitar at his side was in a velvet case. Joe Smith's gift-sword was buckled hard against his most dashing uniform.

A GREAT hum of conversation arose, all about the war; and in due time gossip touched upon Captain Ericsson's newfangled ship, the *Monitor*, so recently launched. From there it was only a short jump to Captain Ericsson himself.

"Hot-air Ericsson!" Lieutenant Joe Smith jeered. That was what they had called the brilliant Swede since the failure of his "caloric" engine. "He is nothing but failure all along the line. I have heard that he actually put a steam-engine into competition with George Stephenson's 'Rocket' on the London and Manchester railway."

"That was the *Novelty*," Lieutenant Greene said, with an angry flush. "And the *Novelty* ran away from the *Rocket* like a scared rabbit."

"She went a mile a minute, according to the records," Senator Spangler contributed, from behind the *Congress*' candy topsail.

"So she did—for one minute," Joe Smith said dryly.

A burst of laughter rewarded his gibe. It was true that Ericsson's locomotive *Novelty* had broken down in mid-career, just as years later his ironclad the *Princeton* burst her famous gun the "Peacemaker," and killed the Secretary of War, who was at hand to pass upon the gun's merits.

"Was it not this same Ericsson," Charlotte Breck asked, with a look of mischief, "who made himself immortal with his invention of attaching a weight to a cow's tail to keep her from switching it into the milk?"

She had been talking to Joe Smith behind her fan, Lieutenant Greene remembered; Joe had put her up to this pert witticism. He slanted an envious eye at Joe's gift-sword, in its fire-gilt scabbard. His gorge rose.

And now Joe Smith had got the bit in his teeth. The *Monitor*, he asserted, was a monstrosity worse than the *Merrimac*, and neither was worth the powder

to blow her across the river. One broadside from a ship like the *Congress* would sink the pair of them, with all the iron they had wrapped round their necks.

"As for the *Monitor*," Joe added, "let alone her chances in battle, her people will die for lack of air, before she can get on the ground. She is nothing better than a floating coffin."

"Lieutenant Greene knows something of her," Senator Spangler suggested. "What can you say in her defence, Lieutenant?"

"Some said she would go to the bottom of the East River when she left the ways," the Lieutenant said, "but she floated well enough. I heard next that the men in her turret would be paralyzed by her own gunfire, but they are still alive and kicking."

"You would like her chances, say, against the *Congress*?" Spangler queried.

"The *Congress* will be as much good against an ironclad as that candy model of her," Lieutenant Greene asserted.

"Brave words from a midshipman," Joe Smith said with an angry flush.

It was as if the *Congress* and the *Monitor* had exchanged broadsides; there was a smell of powder in the air, and Mrs. Spangler made haste to guide conversation into safer channels. As soon as supper was over, Acting Master Howard got his friend Greene by the arm, and piloted him back into the billiard-room.

"It may be as you say," Howard said to the still smoldering Lieutenant, "but I advise you to go and shake Joe's hand before the evening's done. He may be in more danger from that girl than from that iron ram."

"Are they engaged?" the Lieutenant inquired gloomily.

"For anything I know, they may be married secretly," Sam Howard grinned. "Secrets are the order of the day. Let me whisper one in your ear: I was in Richmond on Saturday under a flag of truce, to bring some exchanged prisoners down the river. Well, I caught a glimpse of Charlotte Breck there."

"The devil!" said Lieutenant Greene.

"The devil's sister," his friend amended. "Well, it was Charlotte, anyhow, in a coach that had the silver mountings wrenched off, and two mules pulling it, because all their darling horses' have gone away to drag artillery for the Richmond Howitzers. A girl like Charlotte can go through Rebel lines like thistle. Who would stop her? Would you?"

"It wasn't Charlotte," the Lieutenant muttered.

"How could I mistake her? She was in an old tattered dress and a straw hat that looked as if she had plaited it with her own fingers. It was Charlotte, right enough."

"You think she is a spy here?"

"She might carry tales, if her sympathies were there. What the South wants to know about us, it finds out quick enough."

"Her father's in our service," Greene said. "Lieutenant Warfield Breck."

"Warfield Breck has grown gray in the naval service, and still he's only a lieutenant. He may bear a grudge. We are drifting to perdition here," Sam Howard whispered. "A man can't trust his blood-brother any more. As for Charlotte Breck—well, she is beautiful enough to be any man's damnation."

"You are mistaken," Greene retorted.

"I stand corrected," Sam Howard said, and gave his friend a queer look. "Well, then, she is not that beautiful."

He bowed over the billiard-table and attempted a difficult screw-shot, which took all his concentration.

YOUNG Greene felt an anguish in his blood like a physical sickness. He walked away into the hall, and shut the door against his friend, as if he could shut out the accusation with the sight of the accuser.

Almost at once he encountered Charlotte Breck.

"You have behaved very badly," she said, and brushed her lips with the tips of her fan, whose little oval mirrors sent out flashes of light.

"I?" said Lieutenant Greene.

"You know you have. You are on the rampage tonight. It was like sticking a knife into Joe to despise his lovely frigate as you did. I am furious with you."

"I am sorry for that, at least."

"Then tell Joe you are sorry. But no, you can't. Joe's gone."

"Are you his friend?"

"I am devoted to him, certainly."

"Then pray for him. If ever that iron ram comes out of Norfolk, and the *Monitor*'s not ready for her, the frigates will be knocked into lucifer matches," Lieutenant Greene stated, at white heat.

"But that," said Charlotte, "is matter of opinion, isn't it?"

"Opinion—opinion? This war is all opinion. There's not an ounce of fight in it, I think," the Lieutenant stormed,

ready to shut his fingers on her exasperating fan.

"Moderate your tones, do," Charlotte said. "I'm really not deaf."

She backed away from him, and put out her hand to the panel of a red morocco door. Quite by chance, it seemed, the door yielded, and showed him a small octagonal music-room, hung with red damask.

"We could be alone there for a moment," he suggested.

The girl hesitated, then with swift steps maneuvered her skirt-hoop through the doorway.

Lieutenant Greene came after her, and shut the door back of him.

"How damned unapproachable they are," he thought, seeing the vast circumference of the hoop.

"I still say," Charlotte began a little breathlessly, as if to gain time, "it was outrageous of you to slight Joe's ship, when you know how his very soul is bound up in it. *Candy-ship* indeed! I have heard Joe say there are not five ships in the world that can match broadsides with her."

Lieutenant Greene came as close as the hoop allowed.

Now he saw himself tinnily reflected in one of the fan-mirrors: his hair and eyes, black as iron; his willful mouth; the slightly hollowed cheek that had made Charlotte say once, to madden him, that he resembled Edgar Allan Poe the poet.

"Are you in love with Joe?" he asked.

"If you ask me downright, I shall say yes," Charlotte laughed.

"Then I won't ask you."

"Then I say no."

"But you have given him a sword, I hear."

"He asked for it."

"Will you give me what I ask for?" the Lieutenant pressed.

"Now you are going to ask for my heart again," Charlotte pouted. "I had better go. It is fearfully indiscreet of me to listen to you here," she murmured.

"Not so fast," Dan Greene said. He was standing between her and the door, which she herself had opened for him.

"You and Joe are all for frigates," he said. "Will you back your opinion with a wager?"

"Women are gamblers," Charlotte laughed. "What's the wager?"

"If the *Monitor* wins—well, you are to give me your cheek—just your cheek," the Lieutenant urged.

She narrowed her shoulders.

"But that's like selling myself to the devil," she whispered.

"You will never have to pay the forfeit. You have Joe's word for that."

"But what do I stand to gain, if I win?"

"I will pester you no more."

"Is it possible?" Charlotte rippled.

"The wager will take care of that," the Lieutenant said. "Because—for one thing, I have got my appointment as executive officer of this floating coffin, the *Monitor*. I go second in command."

He was agreeably conscious of a swift change in Charlotte. She was staggered; her eyes showed it.

"Dan, you are too young," she faltered.

"Young in years, old in hours," he quoted jeeringly.

"When do you sail?" Charlotte spoke so faintly that her lips hardly seemed to shape the words.

"On the sixth of March," he replied.

He had been indiscreet, he saw at once. But there was no help for it, and in any case it was hard to think that Charlotte Breck could not be trusted. Her hoops dipped; he felt himself at the heart of a sachet-scented cloud of tulle. . . .

She had kissed him, he found a moment later. Then, at a slight sound, her arm slid from his neck. They sprang apart, and Lieutenant Greene saw a small black cat walking on the carpet at his feet.

"I have brought you bad luck," Charlotte cried, under her breath.

"Not you," he said. "You shall see."

"But you have got my fan."

"That's to whip the *Merrimac* with," he laughed.

He shut the red door against her.

CHAPTER TWO

LIEUTENANT GREENE stood in the middle of Captain Ericsson's parlor in Franklin Street, New York City, and stared at a woman's picture on the wall.

"Who is that?" he asked the maid, Ann—whose hair, too tightly plaited, was nevertheless the color of Charlotte Breck's.

"That is Mrs. Ericsson," Ann said, blushing.

"But she is not here in New York?"

"She is in Europe. She did not like it here. She was jealous."

"Jealous?" the Lieutenant repeated.

"Of a steam-engine," Ann tittered, and from the doorway pointed an eloquent finger at the new rudder-drawings on the drawing-board. The *Monitor* was the latest substitute for Mrs. Ericsson.

Lieutenant Greene in his present mood was not sure that he could take this iron love, whose kiss might be death, quite so closely into his embrace as Ericsson. Nevertheless he believed that the new ship would do what was expected of her.

Ericsson came in briskly, and laid his beaver hat on a shelf. The inventor had a military figure and showed his immense physical strength with every move. His broad shoulders were wedged inside a black frock-coat, well open at the throat; and his velvet vest was cut to make a good display of shirt-front. His blue eyes had a light of genius in them.

"What news, sir?" he asked sharply.

"Glorious," the Lieutenant said. "The Naval Board will not insist on a new rudder of their own design. They will let yours stand, with the alterations you have made, Captain."

"By God, sir, they are well-advised," Ericsson said, sitting down to his drawing-board, where he spent fourteen hours of his day. "A new rudder will waste a month, and be no better in the end. The *Monitor* is mine, and I say she shall go as she is."

"Today is March sixth, and she is going, sir."

"Good. She will split any ship afloat into straps and strings," Ericsson exulted.

"The Naval Board is not so confident as you are."

"The Board. I know. Poor old Commodore Smith has had the fidgets this past month. If the *Monitor* fails, he will be mortified, he writes me. Mortified! There are worse predicaments. Consider what they ask of me, Lieutenant. I am under contract to build a seagoing shot-proof battery, a thing that never was in the world before. I am to do it in a hundred days."

"You have done it, sir."

"So I have. And she is to mount guns heavier than have been put on any ship in history. She mounts them. Next, she is to be invulnerable. I guarantee the safety of her men and of the very guns in her turret, in battle. And now what, sir? Here she is, untried, new in every part, like nothing that ever was seen or heard of, and the contract says if she does not work in all respects to the complete satisfaction of the Naval Board—in short,

if she does not gain the victory—then the money advanced for her construction is to be forfeited, and my good friends ruined."

"She will give the *Merrimac* enough, sir," Lieutenant Greene said.

"The *Merrimac*," Ericsson cried, turning on him like a tiger. "What's the *Merrimac*? An old frigate botched up with a lot of railroad iron on her sides, and a beak for ramming. I doubt if she can steam five miles an hour. When you sight her, lay her aboard," Ericsson said, with a burning of conviction in his brilliant eyes. "Come as close to her as ever you can get, and let drive. Let go at point-blank range, and you will crack her in pieces."

"Trust me for that," said Greene.

"Trust you?" Ericsson repeated rather gloomily. "I don't know. You are pretty young. But I suppose they won't risk putting their important men on board of her. They give you up for gone already. They'll never learn. Good God, they sent me here yesterday a young upstart named Lieutenant Porter—"

"Dave Porter!" Greene exclaimed.

"I showed him a drawing of the turret's turntable, and he thought it was a coffee-mill," Ericsson roared. "Do you know what? He thought I carried the engine in the turret. Why, the girl knew better than that!"

"The girl?"

"Yellow-haired girl named Breck—and pretty as paint. She went aboard with us."

"She went aboard the *Monitor*?" Lieutenant Greene muttered. He felt the walls of his heart pinch together.

"Insisted on it," said the inventor. "Just looked at me over a big white muff, and said she really must go where the Lieutenant went. Afraid of getting lost. She could see at a glance the merits of the ship."

"I don't doubt it," the Lieutenant said. He felt the clash of angels' and devils' wings over his head.

"Well, young sir, I wish you all luck," Ericsson said. He got up and wrung Dan Greene's hand. "Remember, victory may rest with the last cannon-shot."

AN hour later, Lieutenant Greene was looking down from a wharf end at the flat iron decks of "Ericsson's Folly." She was small enough, in all conscience. There was neither head nor tail to her, since she was pointed at both ends; and her hull was just eighteen inches out of

water. Amidships, the famous revolving turret looked no bigger than a collar-box, and her pilot-house forward was just a crib-work of iron bars.

Lieutenant Greene lowered himself to her deck, and then, mounting the wooden ladder leaning against the turret, went down through the escape hatch. In spite of himself, a chill struck through him. This place was like an inside view of Ericsson's brain. The turret, only twenty feet in diameter, was as smooth as a butternut on the inside of its shell. The two great guns, Dahlgrens, were like a team of black oxen standing in an iron stall.

"Sure it's an elegant pair of bursters, sor," said John Rooney, Master-at-Arms.

Rooney's vast face had its features all collected close together in the center of it; and he had a lighted battle-lantern swinging from one ponderous fist.

"Has the ship been leaking any more?" the Lieutenant asked sharply.

"Only just enough to keep her sweet, sor."

"Then what is it you are looking for?"

The Master-at-Arms said sheepishly that he had caught a glimpse of a cat just going round the corner into the berth-deck alley, half an hour back.

"It's no place for a cat aboard this one, sor," Rooney muttered, shining the light of his lantern down between the gun-trucks.

"If you find her, set her ashore," the Lieutenant said.

The cat was more than likely a product of Rooney's imagination. The Master-at-Arms looked as if he had taken an overdose of tanglefoot in anticipation of a bad voyage.

Lieutenant Greene had no time for such foolishness. The orders were to proceed at once to Hampton Roads. A little navy tug, the *Seth Low*, came up the East River and took the *Monitor* in tow; Dan Greene thereafter in his watch below sat with a yellow pad on his knee, making out a station bill.

But he was restless, and felt as if the blood in his veins had turned to quicksilver. Charlotte Breck had come on board in company with Dave Porter, and Porter was Sam Barron's friend, and Sam Barron was an officer who had gone over to the other side.

And Dan Greene had clung to that deceitful creature Breck. She had completely bedeviled him, he saw, with her tears, her trembling mouth, her little sigh that had made a fool of him entirely.



CHARLOTTE BRECK

He didn't doubt now that Sam Howard had actually seen her in the flesh in Richmond. There were facts in his own knowledge that looked that way—as for instance that afternoon when he had gone riding in the neighborhood of Newport News, and had stumbled on a Rebel outpost.

"HOW'S the Constitution down your way?" he had asked that fellow across a plot of swampy ground.

"Torn to rags," the answer came back. "Is there any government left in Washington?"

The two young men had pulled the triggers of their revolvers, and both had missed their mark; and then Charlotte Breck had come riding between them. She had leaned down and whispered in the Rebel's ear; and after that there was no more fighting. Galloping at her side for Newport News, and inwardly raging, Dan Greene had managed to force out: "You know that soldier?"

And Charlotte had said: "You must never breathe it to a living soul, but—he once proposed to me."

Who had not proposed to her? Dan Greene sat in an iron-ribbed room, and stared morosely at the slats of an ivory fan where stood written in Charlotte's handwriting the words: "Ah, can it be—that one like me—can love not two—but sometimes three—all at once?"

Lieutenant Greene dropped the fan into his bunk, and went forward to the pilot-house to begin his watch.

John Worden, the commander, said to him: "Keep the skin off your eyes, Lieutenant. There is a lot put upon this ship, remember."

There was nothing less than the fate of the Union. Greene knew that. Everybody knew it, from Mr. Lincoln down. If the *Merrimac* could clear Hampton Roads of its guard of Union ships, the blockade—the "anaconda," it was called in Washington—would be broken. English arms and supplies would flood in, the Confederacy would have an English market for its cotton, and Europe would recognize its independence.

Nothing stood between the *Merrimac* and this result except the *Monitor*. Considered as a battery, the *Monitor* was strong as death. But there was no predicting her behavior as a ship.

SHE did well enough for the first twenty-four hours of her journey; then an offshore sea began deviling her. She was like an island anchored in the midst of billows that serpined across her low decks, and crashed hard against the turret. Through the slots of her iron pilot-house Lieutenant Greene, bracing himself and staring aft, would see the whole ship vanish, as if sucked under, and then take shape again, a mere pillbox coming up out of nowhere with green water pouring off its sides.

Dead ahead, he would see the hawser throbbing and quaking, and the fat little tug straining at its tow.

Toward the middle of the watch, Worden looked in on him.

"How's she acting, Lieutenant?"

"She's comfortable as an old shoe," Greene said. (Criticism of her antics would be treason!)

"She's taking in a lot of water," Worden said, in his musing voice. He stroked his spade beard. "Seems to be ladling water in under the turret. You might go back and ask the Chief how his pumps are working."

The pumps, it turned out, were not working well at all. Water was pouring in through the hawsepope forward in an eight-inch stream; and it was also cascading in at the base of the turret itself, where the calking had been washed away. All this water had dropped down into the body of the ship, until now there was an inch or so even on the wardroom floor.

Alban Stimers, volunteer Chief Engineer, looked somber in the light of a battle-lantern.

"Steam is down," he said to Lieutenant Greene. "These blower-belts have got wet and there's too much slip—nothing to blow up the fires with. No fire, no steam. No steam, no pumps."

No pumps, no ship, he might as well have said, Lieutenant Greene thought.

He went into the engine-room. Lacking her blowers, the ship was filling up with coal-gas. Already Mike Mooney was down on his hands and knees, his nose close against the plates. "Smutball," he was called. He was a fireman. He tried to snuff a little air.

"What are you looking for there?" Lieutenant Greene shouted savagely.

"He's looking for the cat, sir," Bill Durst said.

Bill, naked to the waist, and furred like a bear even on his shoulder-caps, was hanging from one of the hooks in which the slice bars were cradled.

"'Twas a black cat," came the voice of the Master-at-Arms. "The bhoys do be saying 'tis the black cat at the bottom of it."

"The cat was at the bottom of the bottle," the Lieutenant said savagely. "You, Bill, pick Mike up and carry him into the turret."

Bill's eyes had a comical sleepy twinkle. Like *Sancho Panza's* ass, he answered nothing, but pitched forward to the plates.

A cry was raised. "All out of the engine-room!" Those who still had strength for it shouldered the rest, and dragged them up into the turret, where they lay like dead men. There would be nothing but corpses with which to fight the *Merrimac*. This was what had been predicted for the *Monitor*.

It seemed to the despairing Lieutenant that he could see Ericsson bending over his eternal drawing-board, coaxing forth this monster from its hiding-place somewhere under the brain's eaves, and muttering: "If they follow my drawings, there can't be anything wrong with her."

Perhaps then they had not followed the drawings. Certainly there was nothing wrong with the idea of her. The *Monitor* had begun as an idea, and ideas had no mercy. Ideas were pitiless.

Greene thought fiercely: "Joe Smith will have the laugh on me."

He worked frantically to rig a hand-pump, but it lacked force to throw the water out at the top of the turret.

"Buckets!" Lieutenant Greene shouted.

Since the pumps would no longer work, he would have to pass the water

out in buckets, through the escape-hatch in the top of the turret. A line was formed, but the men staggered in their tracks from the effects of gas, and slopped the water out.

"She's a madhouse," the burly junior gun-captain hissed in Rooney's ear, and passed him a bucket with no more than a pint in the bottom of it.

"She's made of horseshoes, don't you be forgetting," Rooney gasped.

The Master-at-Arms had hit on something there. The turret, it so happened, had actually been made out of a mountain of cast horseshoes. The *Monitor* was born lucky, and she was finding a voice to trumpet this fact to a disbelieving world. She banged and howled and clattered. All the scrap-iron of which her bones were made had come to life—keys, pokers, knives, skate-irons, tongs, shears, pot-hooks, shovel-blades and canon-lades.

And with every plunge a sinister sound came out of the anchor-well, now like an exultant Rebel yell—*ah-e-e-e-e-e-e*—and again like the groans of twenty dead men. The bucket-passers stood stock-still in their tracks, and darted apprehensive looks over their shoulders. They flitted here and there, clawing for holds, like bats seeking some upside-down perch in this bedlam.

Rooney dropped his bucket.

"There she goes now," he yelled.

Rooney's cat would be the undoing of them. Fearful of stepping on it,—for a seaman would throw rocks at his grandmother sooner than kill a cat,—they lifted their feet high, and hardly dared to put them down at all. They had eyes for nothing but that cat, which kept escaping them, and fleeing into inaccessible corners of the ship.

NOW a new motion had got into the *Monitor*. She had begun yawning and jerking at her hawser. Lieutenant Greene, thrown hard against a gun-truck, felt the wrench to his bad shoulder, as if a bolt of iron had been shoved through him from breast to back. He was in a mood to wish this insufferable craft at the bottom of the sea. He went forward, and had just grasped a rung of the ladder leading up into that iron cave that made the wheelhouse, when a descending foot shod with a thick boot almost crushed his knuckles.

Then Lieutenant Worden was standing toe to toe with him, and holding a small black cat by the nape of its neck.

"Where did this kitty come from?" Worden asked placidly. "I just scrubbed her off my back."

"Can't say, sir," the stupefied Lieutenant mumbled. He managed to ask: "What's happened to the steering?"

"Wheel's jammed. Wire slipped off the drum. Ship's motion jumped it off," the commander said.

He had the cat close against him and was stroking it. Lieutenant Greene was thinking that Charlotte Breck had shaken it out of her white muff, while Porter was making his investigation. She had put a curse on them which any sailor would recognize as such. It was probably the very cat that had arched its back so inauspiciously in the red music-room.

The lanky red Dane who had the wheel was working violently with an iron bar to crowd the tiller-wire back in place. Isaac Newton, first assistant engineer, came along through the alley, wiping his hands on a piece of cotton waste.

"How's she pumping?" Worden asked.

"Hardly any, sir. Pumps are mostly drowned," Newton said through a draggled walrus-mustache.

"Stop the main engine. Turn what steam there is on the pumps," Worden said, without a trace of worriment.

The *Monitor* gave her wolf-howl forward, but she would never have the audacity to sink without her commander's say-so.

There was more banging and shuddering all through her.

"We have got to haul that tug, or she will tow us under," Greene suggested.

But no human voice would carry against this wind and sea. Nor could a man crawl forward far enough to cut the tug's hawser, without being swept overboard. The deck of the *Monitor* was no better than the back of a whale.

"Show a red light," Worden commanded. "And put this cat somewhere for safekeeping, will you, Lieutenant?"

The Lieutenant went back into the turret, holding the cat in both hands. The men there were still feebly passing buckets. They clung like bees to the legs and rungs of the ladder lashed into place under the hatch, which Tom Cochran, the junior gun-captain, slid open and shut as he saw his chance to empty a bucket.

"Here's your cat," the Lieutenant said to Rooney.

"Sure, sir, it's kilt I thought she was entirely," Rooney marveled. "She's too young for a ship the likes of this one."

"Take her."

"There's not enough of her to make a hummingbird a pair of leggings," Rooney crooned, with the cat hugged against his heart. "Whose is she, sor?"

"She's yours, Rooney," the Lieutenant said. He selected a flare from the rocket-box and supplied himself with a lucifer match.

"Gangway," he said. "Down buckets."

He waited for a lull; and then, motioning to Cochrane to open the hatch, set fire to the flare and pointed it.

The blue light reared high up into a windy heaven, and Cochrane tried to shut the hatch. He was just too late. A steep sea tilted against the turret; and ramming through into that narrow cell, washed the men back against its bolt-studded wall.

Lieutenant Greene was knocked down onto the breech of the nearest gun; and picking himself up, he saw that Rooney, drenched to the skin, still had the cat in his two hands.

"What'll I do with her, sor?" the Master-at-Arms gasped.

"She's our mascot," Greene said, making a virtue of necessity. "She's got nine lives, and so have we, men. Put her in the gun, Rooney, for safekeeping."

"In the gun, sor?"

"In the Peacemaker."

The Lieutenant snatched the tampon, or wooden stopper, out of the muzzle of that gun, shoved the cat down into that black throat, and almost in the same move, replaced the stopper.

No sooner had the black cat ceased to haunt them than the ship's luck changed. The tug took a hint from the flare, and towed her inshore into a patch of smoother water. Isaac Newton got his blowers going again, and with steam made again, pumped out his ship.

The *Monitor*, from having been a weakling at its last gasp, now loomed again as a thing of infinite strength and cunning.

"A cheese-box on a raft, they do be calling her," Rooney crooned happily. "There's no mortal cheese has got the strength into her this divil has."

The sun came up, and dried her decks. The sea was smooth as glass. By mid-afternoon, the *Monitor* was halfway between Cape Henry and Fortress Monroe. Lieutenant Worden, on the turret, pointed his telescope in the direction of Newport News.

"Here's a pilot-boat on the starboard quarter," he said to Lieutenant Greene.

The pilot-boat came alongside, and dropped a pilot on the *Monitor*'s deck, a hawk-nosed fellow in a red cap and salt-stained reefer.

"What news, Pilot?" Lieutenant Worden hailed him.

"Bad news," the pilot said. "The *Merrimac* has come down from Norfolk, sir."

The pilot seemed ready to despair of this sunken pig of a ship and her crew of sooty phantoms.

"How's the fighting?"

"Bad. The *Cumberland*'s rammed already, and gone down by the head."

"And the *Congress*?" Greene cried.

"That's her smoking, sir, in the southwest. She's done for too."

Joe Smith's ship was done for; the *Monitor* had come too late. Or rather the *Merrimac* had come too early, no doubt on Charlotte Breck's advice. . . . Lieutenant Greene had Charlotte's face painted on his flaming eyelids—that fey look, the importuning eyes, whirlpools that had dragged him down.

Then he heard the pilot saying: "She's no more than a flea-bite, this one aint."

There was a sound of heavy guns near Newport News, and a smudge of black smoke rising there.

"How many guns you got, Captain?" asked the pilot.

"Two guns."

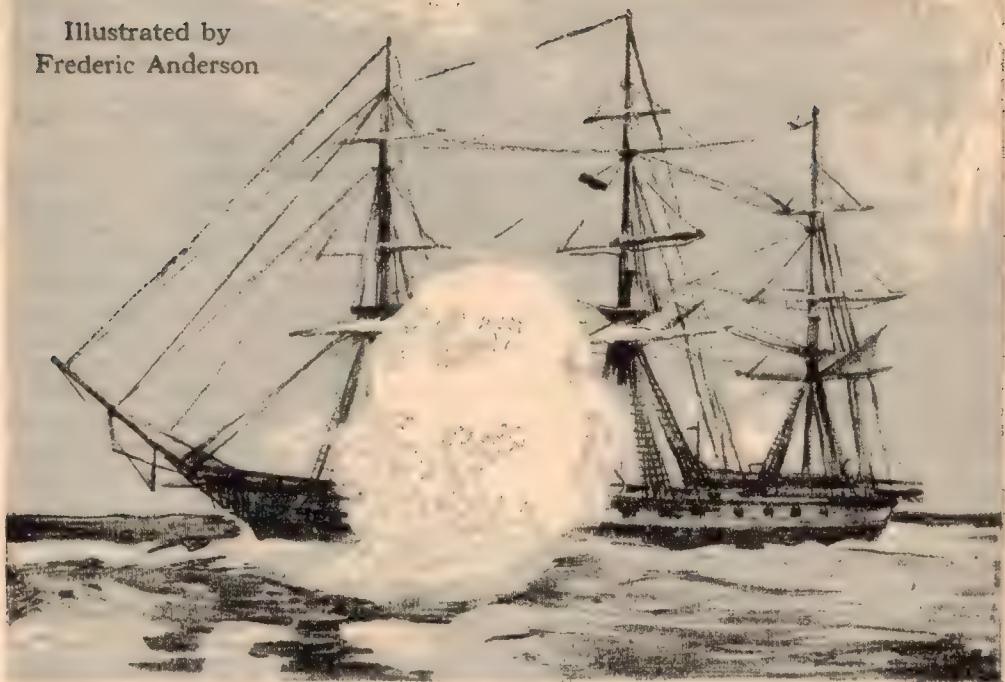
"She's got ten. You'll have your troubles, sir, when that thing gets afoul of you! Why, she spits ginger out of all her portholes. And ram! Gorramighty, she can ram any living thing. Must be she goes fifteen miles an hour. What's the answer to that?"

"There's an answer to anything," Lieutenant Greene affirmed. . . . Perhaps even an answer to Charlotte Breck's treason.

CHAPTER THREE

SHORTLY before midnight, the *Monitor* dropped anchor on the starboard side of the Union frigate *Minnesota*, which had stuck fast in the mud on the way to join battle with the *Merrimac*. Two miles away, the *Congress* blazed fiercely. All her gun-ports glowed like coals; and some of her great guns that had been left shotted in the confusion of a losing battle were now and again going off of themselves. Beads of fire dripped from her cock-billed yards; and the water under her bows showed like a pool of blood.

Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson



The *Minnesota* had been mauled herself, a little, just before the evening tide failed. Forward, on her starboard bow, where a shell had pierced her, a carpenter, lowered in a trousers-sling, was nailing a lead apron over the hole. A stray shot had passed through the foremast, and the carpenter's gang were assembling the mast-bands and fishes required for a crippled mast. A reek of burned powder and a smell of vinegar came out of opened hatches.

Sand grated under Lieutenant Greene's heels as he followed his commander aft. The cockpit sentry stopped his pacing to let them by; and young Greene had a glimpse of the amputation-table, heavy with blood, scored with the marks of surgeons' knives and saws. It was now the couch of a quarter-gunner, who lay snatching forty winks, with a bundle of cannon lock-strings, priming wires, rags and tourniquets hanging from his belt.

The tourniquets suggested limbs struck away; and Lieutenant Greene furtively closed his fingers on his two arms, that were still part of him. There was battle in the air, battle and sudden death. Blood and bones would be the order of the day. He stepped across a sill into the Captain's cabin.

Around a green baize table were sitting Captain Marston of the *Roanoke*, Captain Van Brunt of the *Minnesota*,

and Lieutenant Warfield Breck of the Ordnance Department. Standing against a whitewashed bulkhead was Sam Howard, who gave his friend Greene a left-handed shake because his right arm was in a sling.

"There has been hot work here, Dan," Howard said in a voice of gloom that was unlike him. "And by God, no man knows what the morrow will bring forth."

"Sit down, gentlemen," Captain Van Brunt said.

The old sea-dog's voice sounded as if grit or powder had got into his throat. His eyes were bloodshot, and his mutton-chop whiskers floated away from his cheeks in an untidy tangle. On the table in front of him lay a black-and-white shot-box with the ship's chronometer packed round with gun-wadding to shield it from the jar of the great pivot-gun overhead.

The chronometer ticked the time away placidly.

The senior Captain, Marston of the *Roanoke*, had a head like a cannon-ball heated cherry-red, and set down on his thick shoulders. He said to Worden: "You know the day has gone against us, I assume?"

"Yes sir."

"We went aground here while being towed to the *Cumberland*'s assistance,"

Marston went on. "I believe our pilot is a rascal."

"I had the very best account of him," Lieutenant Warfield Breck countered, with a dry cough.

So it was Breck who had got a pilot for the *Minnesota*, and landed her here in a cradle of mud! Lieutenant Greene was thinking that the pilot might not be the only rascal. He had lost confidence in everyone. He looked at Charlotte's father with a critical eye. Lieutenant Breck had a narrow, aristocratic face, and his mustache and beard were strong reminders of Charlotte's flaxen locks. The sands in Charlotte's hourglass were gold, but there was blood on that gold. The Brecks had turned their coats, Dan Greene was certain.

But his opinion was not asked for.

"Where is the *Merrimac* now?" Lieutenant Worden asked.

"Anchored off Sewall's Point, sir," Sam Howard said. "We shall have her at us again in the morning."

"Let her come," Van Brunt roared. "I am never the man to say the jig is up."

"I was on the *Cumberland*," Howard said mournfully. "The best she could do was fight her guns to the water's edge, and then sink alongside. I tell you, Captain, there isn't a ship in the world, or any combination of ships, that can do anything against the *Merrimac*."

"Give us the skinny of it, sir," Captain Marston said.

"It began about two bells in the afternoon watch. I had just come on deck when the quartermaster on the watch—he was an old friend of mine—well, he came over and said to me: 'I believe that thing is coming down the river at last; sir.'"

They had got into the habit of referring to "that thing," Lieutenant Greene noted, as if it were the Cretan Minotaur that used to devour Athenian youths and maidens sent as tribute.

"She was coming, all right," Howard went on. "She looked like some kind of a long shed sunk to the eaves and drifting with the tide. Black—black as soot. I believe to my soul it is nothing more than railroad iron they have ripped up and plated her with, sir."

"That is my information," Captain Marston said.

"The *Cumberland* beat to quarters," Howard took up the thread again, "and manned her springs to see if her broadside could be brought to bear down channel, but she wouldn't budge. Then,

along about four bells, the *Merrimac* was close enough for us to pitch a solid shot at her from one of our stern guns."

Acting Master Howard hung fire, as if he had no words to express what followed.

"Well, go on, sir," Van Brunt said, sliding his arms forward on the table.

"We unlatched that gun, and I marked the flight of the shot myself. It struck the *Merrimac*'s iron, and bounced off like a rubber ball. It was pitiful," Sam Howard muttered, with a surge of sailor-like emotion at the vanishing of a tradition that had borne a priceless charm for him. His voice was like an echo from the tomb where hope lies buried.

"A rubber ball," Marston repeated, with a scowl. He stabbed at the paper-weight in front of him with a silver knife.

"I might as well have thrown a spit-ball at her," Howard asserted. "She came on, and let go a broadside at the *Congress*, but it was the *Cumberland* she was marking."

"It was the *Cumberland*'s rifle-guns she was afraid of," Captain Marston said.

"I don't think she was afraid of anything. But she was in a hurry to see what the *Cumberland* could do to her. And all the while I could see something like a shark's fin ripping the water out ahead of her forward casemate."

"Her beak, I take it," Van Brunt said.

"Her devil's claw. It must have weighed tons. The *Cumberland* let drive with her forward starboard guns and the pivot-gun, and that fellow opened with his bow-rifle. We took a bad drubbing from those infernal seven-inch rifles, sir. Our bow-division had fifteen out of the sixteen men there killed or put on their backs. It was a shambles, no mistake."

AN attempt was made to shift one of the forward guns across to the bridle port, but a shell killed them all. Men were nothing in that furnace, he went on. It was hardly possible to live in the showers of oak splinters that filled the air. The *Merrimac*'s shells searched the whole ship, every last cranny. They stabbed it through and through, knocked the guns sidewise, pulled up the decks, reached into the cockpit and killed the wounded.

And all the while the *Merrimac* came on, head down like a black bull on the loose, getting closer and looking for a chance to ram.

"She found it soon enough," Sam Howard reported dismally. "She hit us,

in the main-chains, under the port bow. Our ship heeled over till her foreyard was all but in the water."

"How big a hole was stove in her?" Marston asked.

"Big enough to drive a wagon and four horses through," Sam Howard said. "It was big enough, but the *Merrimac* is a hornet that will sting only once, I fancy," he went on with a kind of mournful triumph. "That ram broke off short in her gizzard after it had done its work. And then I heard all the ship's bells ringing like mad, and a rattle of gun-stones in her hold. There was a cry of, 'Save who can!' and a whistle through her hatches, and down she went in fifty feet of water. But her flag's still waving at the main truck."

"I wish the same might be said of the *Congress*," Van Brunt said with a mortified look. "The white flag was run up there, after little more than half an hour's fight. Her captain was not aboard, it's true, but I looked for Joe Smith to have more resistance in him."

Lieutenant Greene felt the blood fluctuate in his throat.

"Joe Smith would never show a white flag, sir," he cried thickly. "I know him too well. If the *Congress* showed that flag, then Smith is dead."

"Unfortunately, he was seen going ashore, in the stern-sheets of the ship's gig," Marston said grimly. "There seems to be no doubt that the battle got too hot for him."

"Not for Joe," Lieutenant Greene said under his breath, with an appealing look at Warfield Breck, as if it had been Charlotte who was sitting there in judgment on her dead lover.

There was a moment of total silence, except for the chiming stroke of the chronometer in its battle-clothes. Lieutenant Breck let his head sink forward slowly, and said nothing at all.

An officer with a bleeding scratch on his cheek stood in the doorway and saluted.

"The tug has tried again, and can't pull us off, sir."

"Then the devil and Tom Walker couldn't pull us off," Van Brunt said, rising. "We will fight it out as we lie. Our little friend the *Monitor* may have a shot or two in her locker, to help us."

"One moment! Orders have come from Washington to send the *Monitor* up the Potomac as soon as she arrives," Marston said. "What shall we make of these orders, gentlemen?"

"If they came to me, I should obey them," Warfield Breck said firmly.

"The situation has changed since they were written," Marston answered.

"For the worse," Van Brunt cried.

"Ericsson's battery will never change it for the better," Breck said. "I know the man too well. He is a scatterbrain. Have you forgotten the explosion of the Peacemaker?"

"But the new Peacemaker won't blow up, sir," Lieutenant Greene heard himself saying. "I have heard Captain Ericsson say she is good for a charge of thirty pounds of powder."

THE heads of the two captains came round to him at that mention of thirty pounds of powder.

"Fifteen pounds is the maximum set by the Bureau of Ordnance, I believe," Marston said dryly.

"We can whip her with fifteen pounds," Lieutenant Worden said calmly. "Try us, Captain. Don't send away your best defence."

"Let me look at her again," Marston said.

He led the way on deck. Lieutenant Greene brought up the rear, with a choking sense that everything was in the balance. Might Breck tilt the beam?

A shadow like doom seemed to have descended on the great frigate. Against a sky sharp with spring stars, there was a trembling array of hauling-lines for sending up small arms and ammunition into the fighting tops. A baleful glow from the fire-box of the tug *Dragon* lit up the *Minnesota*'s counter, and the exercise of the stern pivot-gun was going forward briskly.

A voice cried, "Lashings of the gun-adrift! . . . In-tackles, cast loose! . . . Out tackles—cast loose! . . . Fore-carriage levers—ship!"

The exercise moved like clockwork, Lieutenant Greene was willing to acknowledge. The gun-crew were seasoned men. Their rope-soled canvas shoes hissed on a sanded deck, to the clash and clang of levers, grunts, pantings, sharply barked orders. But they might as well use wooden guns, quakers, against the *Merrimac*, young Greene was thinking, with a flush of prideful feeling for the *Monitor*. This Folly of Ericsson's was like an armed knight coming to the aid of a maiden in distress. And the maiden was the frigate *Minnesota*.

Captain Marston could hardly be expected to see the force of this analogy.



The gun was a madman that must be coaxed and reasoned with. . . . Sponge, load, fire!

He had his shoulders hoisted high, and was looking down at the *Monitor* with a mistrustful eye.

"Why, she's nothing better than a pin-prick," the senior captain rumbled.

Everything hung by a shoestring, and Lieutenant Greene swayed up on his toes, expecting nothing less than an order to repair to Washington.

That order never came. Instead, there was a last thunder-clap out of the burning *Congress*. The fire had reached her magazines, and she blew up, crumbling like an ember, and throwing her guns, masts and yards sky-high.

"I think I'll take the risk of disobeying orders," Marston said grimly. "The *Monitor* will stay where she is."

"If you will give us a pilot, sir, we'll go on board and get a little sleep," Lieutenant Worden suggested.

"Acting Master Howard will go with you as pilot. He knows the roads, and you can trust him."

Lieutenant Greene, lying sleepless in his bunk, wondered if a man's blood-brother could be trusted in a war like this one. Sam Howard had turned in just above him, merely taking off his coat and boots, and Greene had caught a glimpse of a walnut-shell slung round his friend's neck by a silk ribbon. He had seen this shell last in Charlotte Breck's possession. It was lined with crimson plush, and made a casket for the model of a tiny frigate, carved in ivory.

The sword to Joe, the frigate to Sam, the fan to himself. Charlotte Breck had been willing to divide herself into three or maybe twenty pieces, like a bridal

bouquet thrown from a garlanded stair-rail. And now poor Joe was dead—surely Joe was dead—and Sam was chained to Charlotte's chariot-wheel, and Dan Greene was going into battle with a feeling that his youth had tricked him, and drawn him into some damnable conspiracy.

He lay conjuring up visions of the *Merrimac*. Like enough, the *Monitor* would not get close enough to engage, but might be grounded out on a mud-flat by the faithless Sam, agent of the Brecks, and Charlotte's slave. . . .

Then he heard Sam saying in his ear: "She's coming for us, Dan. She's coming slam onto us."

IT was morning, and there was Sam out of his bunk, and Sam's arm still in a bloody, dirty sling.

The Lieutenant slid his legs over the bunk-board.

"How close is she?"

"Maybe a couple of miles off. She's coming out from behind Craney's Island."

On his way to the turret, Lieutenant Greene collided with Rooney, who was on his way to see that the galley-fires were put out. The Master-at-Arms had the cat cuddled up against his flanneled ribs.

"I'm jist remembering to take her out of the gun, sor," Rooney mumbled. "It's a battle-cat she is altogether, but I'd better be giving her a dhrop of milk before it's battle stations and the curse of the crows on her."

"You'd better put her back in the gun," Lieutenant Greene said with a dark look at the unlucky animal. "She can run faster than a ball with only fifteen pounds of powder back of it."

He joined Worden on the turret-top.

"She's just coming past the Middle Ground," Worden said.

It was a hazy Sunday morning. Sea-birds wheeled and dived, with weak pipings, as if lamenting the dismal prospect. The roll of "Beat to quarters" on the *Minnesota* sounded more like a funeral knell than a call to battle. What would be the end? The *Merrimac* was a kind of Leviathan. Could the little *Monitor* draw out Leviathan with a hook, could it bore the jaws of Behemoth with a thorn?

LIEUTENANT GREENE swung his glass in a slow circle. Crowds were massing on the high cliffs of Newport News, and nearer at hand the sails of small boats fluttered like moths on the sea's threshold, keeping well out of range of this Leviathan, the *Merrimac*, that came so fast, with the sun burning on her sloping sides.

"They must have torn up half the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad to get the iron for her," Lieutenant Worden said. "Those rails are flat-footed. They pack well."

They made a reedy surface, like a black iron thatch. The *Merrimac* offered no footing for boarders, less even than the *Monitor*. These two strange craft were more like weird denizens of the deep sea than man-made devices.

"What range, sir?" Lieutenant Greene asked.

Lieutenant Worden shut his telescope with a slight ringing sound.

"I will lay the *Monitor* alongside him," he said. "You had better not open fire until the range is down to thirty yards."

Thirty yards! That was holding fire with a vengeance. That was getting too close for comfort, in Lieutenant Greene's opinion—even for an invulnerable ship! He lowered himself through the hatch, and handed the keys of the magazine and shot-room to Tom Carroll, captain of the powder division.

Tom in his gray magazine dress looked like a powder-shape himself. Divested of every particle of metal, and dusted with powder to his eyebrows, he shuffled busily in canvas shoes, arranging the fire-screens that had been let down close to the powder-scuttle in the berth-deck.

"Have a wet swab standing by that water-tub," said Lieutenant Greene.

"Ay-ay, sir."

In the turret, the surgeon Logue distributed tourniquets to the captains of the guns, who ran them through frogs at their belts. Lieutenant Worden, coming down the ladder, laid the palm of his hand against the breech of a gun, and looked sharply at the gun-crews standing by the tackles. Their discipline was perfect: Silence, order, coolness, prevailed.

"You won't need those tourniquets," Worden said with a confident smile. "They can hammer at this turret all they please, they'll never crack it."

"Secure the hatch," Lieutenant Greene commanded.

He looked hard at his gun-captains, Tom Lochrane and John Stocking. Like the guns, they were a well-matched pair, clear-eyed, and heavy in the shoulders. Stripped to the waist, they showed to good advantage in the light of the battle-lantern. Tom was smooth as an egg, and John hairy like a bear; but there was little to choose between them for strength. They had their crews well in hand, with swabs, spongers, rammers, all in place; and the tackles all clear that were to swing back the port-lids, giant pendulums of four-inch iron.

Lieutenant Greene stood between the two guns, propped himself there on rigid arms, drew comfort from his contact with these two thorns with the sting of death in their smutted muzzles.

"Try out the turret, Mr. Stimers," he said.

The turret was already keyed up on its spindle, and Alban Stimers pushed the lever that operated its turning-mechanism. There was a booming rumble of sound. The turret turned, stopped, turned again.

"She'll work all right as soon as we grind the rust out of her," Stimers reported.

The turret rolled, but how would it be after one of the *Merrimac*'s shells had hit it fairly? Would it still turn, or would it be knocked off into the sea, like the head of a mushroom? No man could say, for this was something new under the sun. Ship, turret, guns and men, all were untried. What could the turret stand? For that matter, what could the men inside the turret stand? Assuming that its iron wall might stop a cannon-ball within ninety feet of the gun that fired it, what could be predicted of the effect on flesh-and-blood inside

that wall? Could an irresistible force dislodge an immovable body? John Ericsson had guaranteed the invulnerability of his tower. If he failed, he lost his contract—and the men in the tower lost their lives.

"Mustn't let the old man lose his contract," the Lieutenant was thinking.

He squinted through his peep-sight, a three-quarter-inch hole bored through eleven inches of iron. For just a fraction of a second he had his eye fairly on the *Merrimac*. She was not a hundred yards away, and black smoke poured out of her stack.

"She's making hard work of it," he had just time to think.

Then the *Merrimac* began to ply her guns. Shells passed with a screaming locust-song across the *Monitor's* decks; but there were no hits.

The voice-tube wailed, and Lieutenant Greene put his ear there.

"Commence firing," Lieutenant Worden called, from his station forward in the iron pilot-house.

LIEUTENANT GREENE felt his heart beat hard against the roof of his mouth. He cleared the lock-string of the Peacemaker, and hung it in a loose coil round the lock. The gun was already shotted.

"Port-lids—away!" he commanded.

The enormous pendulums that covered the ports swung back, and two oval patches of pearly daylight glared into the turret. The crouching Lieutenant heard himself giving the command to run out the guns, heard them grumble on their iron slides. They weighed sixteen thousand pounds apiece, and moved on friction rollers along a metal runway. Six men hauled cautiously on the out-tackles, and two held well back on the in-tackles, crouching pantherlike with labored breath. The gun was a madman that must be coaxed and reasoned with.

"Prime!"

The two gun-captains inserted their primers, and turned down the hammers.

Lieutenant Greene adjusted the sliding bars of the rear sights. Then the turret rolled, and he got his eye on the *Merrimac* again; she shaped herself like a black angel of death out of a fleecy cloud. A yeasty yellow froth eddied at her water-line. That was a good mark.

The Lieutenant reminded himself that he had had plenty of schooling in these matters. He must bring his eye to an exact level with the bottom of the sight-notch, or he would fire too high.

And there was no hurry. Not the least in the world. In all likelihood he would be spared for twenty seconds more, and twenty seconds was enough to do his business for him. He stopped the turret with his left hand, and then lowered his right a little.

The hand-spikemen jumped in with their spikes and raised the breech. The cords of their necks stood out hard and white; they clung like limpets.

Dan Greene fell back so as to be well clear of the recoil. Lock-string in hand, he waited with a kind of burning patience for the coincidence of the sights upon the object. The moment came. He stood pegged like an iron man to his post. Promptly and firmly he pulled the lock-string, at the same instant opening his mouth wide, to favor his ear-drums, and rising on his toes.

A whirlwind of smoke and fire wrapped him round. He reeled in his tracks, choked, spat out powder particles. He had the impression that the world must have been split in two like an apple.

The port-lids dropped into place with a clang, and now the turret was as black as a blind man's pocket.

At this instant one of the *Merrimac's* shells struck against it, with a frightful bang. Joe Crown, the gunner's mate, whose hand rested on the inner wall, dropped in a heap. The blow was like the kick of a mule with three hind-legs, and Lieutenant Greene felt as if a waft of death had passed through the turret. His nose was bleeding; he had the impression that he was bleeding at all his pores, and that his heart had stopped its beating.

In fact, nobody was much harmed; even Joe Crown picked himself off the deck, but with one arm hanging limp.

There was a shriek in the voice-tube.

"How are you in the turret?" he heard the commander saying, in a voice as calm as if they were still sitting with John Ericsson in Franklin Street, in the midst of his infallible drawings.

"We are all right here, sir," Greene cried, after a quick look around.

"You were hit," Worden said. "Does the turret still turn?"

"Still turns, sir."

"Then we have his measure," Worden cried, with his first show of emotion.

"What about my shot, sir?" Greene shouted.

"Smacked him, and that's all. Jumped right up into the sun. We've got to

get closer yet. . . . I am going to lay her right alongside."

Lieutenant Greene wondered hazily what Rooney had done with the cat Charlotte Breck had dropped out of her muff.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *Merrimac* had stopped her engines and floated like a log on the surface of the water. She might be stunned. Or then again, she might be playing 'possum. No doubt she was collecting herself, revising her plan of battle, gauging the powers of this new and surprising challenger.

Lieutenant Greene peered through his peephole. The *Merrimac* was just beginning to take shape again. She had seemed to be destroyed, blotted away entirely; but now her iron wall showed without a trace of damage.

These two queer monsters of the deep had felt each other out, and discovered a magnetic attraction. They swam together again. The *Monitor* was bent on ramming, and the *Merrimac* eluded her by a bare two feet. Lieutenant Greene felt that he was moving at the heart of a thundercloud. . . . Sponge, load, fire. The banging of all those iron balls against the *Monitor's* iron turret produced a kind of organ-music. That fellow not more than thirty feet away now might be shooting whole mule-teams out of his guns, by the sound.

Lieutenant Greene, in the thick of all the thunder, put his lips to the voice-tube.

"How does the *Merrimac* bear, sir?"

"Starboard beam. . . . You made the iron fly that last time," Worden said, in his regular counting-house voice.

The Lieutenant returned to his guns.

After each exchange of shots, he had to ask himself how much of his ship was left. Once he fancied that the *Monitor's* boilers, those fat goose-eggs whose shells glowed within a scant foot of the deck, had blown up. But the pulse of the engines told him that the ship's iron heart was still beating.

The turret was on a frolic of its own. It had been hard to start, and now it was harder still to stop. Alban Stimers, wrestling with the lever, growled that a roller-way would be better than this damned spindle.

"You'll have to let the guns go on the fly," he choked out.

Lieutenant Greene whistled at the voice-tube, but already that thing was

out of action. He was cut off from his commander, and drifting hellward in an iron thistle. He went back to his guns, and heard John Stocking crying out to the Master-at-Arms to lower the battle-lantern closer to the deck.

The Lieutenant had a glimpse of Rooney's humorous face hanging only an inch or two above that oily gleam of light from a spermaceti candle. The Master-at-Arms, clad in a cuirass of stout Welsh flannel, against the gripes, was holding his lantern down against the deck in the neighborhood of Stocking's back, which showed a line of blood down the naked spine.

The gun-captain was on his knees, brushing away soot with his fingers, and seeming to search after some lost jewel.

"I can't find the marks," Stocking cried.

He had made broad chalk-marks on the deck under the turret, to mark port and starboard, but soot had overlaid these marks. The men in the turret were now completely ignorant of where the adversary lay. Its whirling motion made them reel, and clutch at hooks, guns, swabs, anything at all, to keep them from being slatted away like drops of water from a turning grindstone. They could hardly tell top from bottom any longer, let alone port and starboard.

Lieutenant Greene let go both guns at a venture, and was rewarded by the apparition of Dan Toffey, the ship's clerk, a yellow-haired lad who looked as if every drop of blood had been drained out of his body.

"Too close," Dan Toffey yelled.

The guns had been fired too close to the fore and aft line of their own ship. The gunners were hampered in two directions. If they shot over their bows, the blast from the gun's mouth would stun and perhaps kill the men in the pilot-house. A shot astern was likely to flatten the boilers. Already, with this last blast, the voice-tube was gone, and now Dan Toffey would have to relay the Captain's orders through the berth-deck alley.

Lieutenant Greene, unable to orient himself, had a moment of hesitation. He had the feeling that he had been fighting these guns since the birth of time. He drew out his watch and lowered it into the lantern-light. But the watch had been stopped, probably by the first concussion. He put it back, thinking of the chronometer which Captain Van Brunt had wrapped so carefully in cotton wool.

Was that still ticking? Was the *Minnesota* still alive?

At this exact moment he was conscious that the pulsations of the engines had stopped. Lieutenant Worden appeared. The commander looked like an angel of light by comparison with his people in the turret. He said in his courteous un hurried voice: "Just swing back one of the port lids, Lieutenant."

A knot of men swayed on the black port-lid tackles. A flash of daylight appeared, and a rush of air came into the turret. A mellow sunbeam glanced on the hot iron of the guns.

Lieutenant Worden put his gloved hands on the gun-muzzles, and lifting his feet, launched his whole body out through the port. Lieutenant Greene heard his commander's heels ring on the iron deck, and at once jumped after him through the port. He had a feeling that the old man must have gone daft.

THREE was a shriek and hum of scragged iron from the rifles of the *Merrimac's* sharpshooters pitter-patter ing on the *Monitor's* iron; but the sharpshooters themselves were not in sight. The *Merrimac* herself looked half dis solved in cannon-smoke.

"What's wrong, sir?" Lieutenant Greene cried, coming up to his com mander on the run.

"Had to get my bearings," Worden answered with the faintest possible grin. "I wouldn't want to lose 'Ericsson's Folly' now."

He went close against the turret, and put his doubled fist into a big dent punched by one of the *Merrimac's* shells.

He drew the fist back.

"It's no more than two inches deep," he exulted.

The smoke was thinning and drifting, and the two ships began to show their iron. Suddenly a cannon-ball from the *Minnesota's* stern-gun rang like a bell against the side of the *Monitor's* turret, and glancing away close enough to her two officers to fan them with its breath, went skipping across the water like a frisky black ram tearing up little foam patches with its hoofs.

"Did you see that, sir?" young Greene cried in an agonized voice.

"That pop-gun of Van Brunt's? He can't hurt us. Let him blaze away."

"It's our own ship shooting at us," Greene reminded him.

"It's just an accidental hit," Worden said, turning his bland brow in the di

rection of the distant frigate. "She can't tell what's harped from what's danced here."

An accident? It might be. Or then again Warfield Breck might be at the lock-string of that gun. The *Monitor* was between two fires.

"Into the turret with you!" Worden said, with a hand on the young man's smudged epaulette.

Lieutenant Greene plunged through the porthole; Worden, following, had Stocking's solid arms to bear him up.

"Is anybody hurt here?" Worden asked, looking round the turret.

"Not a finger-ache amongst us," Greene boasted. "But we had better throw a little wrought iron, sir. Cast-iron just crumbles like a pill."

"Orders are—cast-iron," Worden said.

"Wrought iron is more spiteful," Greene pleaded.

"It will take a charge of thirty pounds of powder, I believe."

"She can stand thirty," the Lieutenant breathed prayerfully.

"No naval gun ever stood thirty."

"There never was a gun like this, sir."

"No doubt," Worden said dryly. "Serve her with cast-iron shot and fifteen pounds of powder, Lieutenant. Hit the *Merrimac* twice in the same place and that will do your business for you."

Twice in the same place! It was like asking lightning to strike twice in the same place. To hit a spot no bigger than a straw hat would cover, in the thick of all this smoke, too, and with the turret going round like some kind of whirling dervish!

The old man was asking the im possible. He was fighting the *Merrimac's* battle for her, the outraged Lieutenant thought, with a burning flush through all his limbs, and the unsettled feeling of a fever patient in his joints and muscles. For just the merest flash of time, he was guilty of thinking crazily that even his commander had gone over to the other side. Battle tore a man to pieces worse than breakbone fever.

"Hold your fire," Lieutenant Worden was saying to him. "I am going to try to ram the *Merrimac's* propeller off."

Lieutenant Greene was alone with his command again. A hot sponge, with drawn steaming from the Peacemaker's mouth, went past his nose. Shot-boxes were being handed out of the scuttle. The gun-crews looked black as imps now; and the powder division were gray er than ever.



"Joe Smith was seen going ashore, in the ship's gig."

"Here's our mutton, sir," John Stocking purred, picking up a cannon-ball. "Here's one that'll rip her up and tear her crosswise and leave her in the shape of nothing."

His big ox-eyes wheeled coyly in a black face. He called his Lieutenant's attention appealingly to this iron bauble which he was shoving with both hands into the space left by his retreating midriff.

The Lieutenant shook his head.

"That's wrought-iron shot."

"A man might as well fash his thumb at her as throw cast-iron, sir," John Stocking groaned.

"Drop it," his Lieutenant commanded.

The burly gun-captain let the shot go down into its box again.

"Brace yourselves. And don't touch the walls of the turret. We are going to ram," Greene notified his men.

The gun-crews crowded themselves against the guns as close as a basket of snakes. They hung on with serious faces. The engines were going full-tilt again, and the ship shook from stem to stern. Two shots chimed against the turret-iron with force enough to start the bolt-heads. . . . But there was no collision.

INSTEAD, the young voice of the ship's clerk, Dan Toffey, startled them. He stood choking in their midst.

"Missed her. Missed her by a hair," he called. "Now's your time for hunks. Open on her, boys. We're right aboard of her."

"Spin the platter, Chief," Lieutenant Greene said, with a look down his shoulder at the crouching Stimers.

The turret groaned and trundled round on its bronze ring. The two guns slid their noses out again. The *Merrimac*'s nightmare shape floated within twenty feet. Her iron looked picked up, ruffled all over; her smokestack and colors had been shot away; a split gun-muzzle stuck out amidships. But she was full of ginger still.

Lieutenant Greene unlatched his two guns one after the other. He fired now without stopping the turret at all, like a sharpshooter shooting from the hip at a glass ball or a bird on the wing.

Then through hot darkness he heard Dan Toffey's cry again.

"She's going to ram us now, Lieutenant! We've got across her bows!"

That report from the outer world was not an idle one. In a second or two the *Merrimac* did actually succeed in heaving herself up bodily on the *Monitor*'s iron-plated deck, with a bad sound of iron rasping on iron. The Lieutenant had a dismal sense of being laid hold of personally, jolted by some bully stronger than himself, and taken in a wrestler's lock. These scaly dragons had come to grips at last! Greene put his eye to the peephole, but he could see nothing. Nevertheless the *Merrimac* was bearing down hard, with a panting of engines and a threshing of white water all round her hull.

"She's climbed aboard us—the curse of the crows on her!" Rooney yelled.

The cheese-box took a fearful tilt, and seemed in a mood to slide off its raft altogether.

The Lieutenant was half smothered under an avalanche of men sweeping him away from his station between the guns. Everything that was not lashed, moved. Water poured out of the fire-tub; the battle-lantern hung out at an impossible angle from its hook; there was a clang of sliding levers.

The ship's people had lost all human dignity, and were no more than insects folded into the smutted petals of some flower of death that was wilting and drooping on its stalk. To add to the confusion, the powder-division swarmed up out of the magazine, clutching at legs and arms, in a mad rush for the escape-hatch.

Lieutenant Greene kicked them down from the ladder with remorseless heels.

"She's coming back," he yelled.

"Hope and hang on," the Master-at-Arms moaned, with his fat body laid across a gun-truck.

And then miraculously the *Monitor* was on an even keel again. The *Merrimac*'s prow had dropped off into the water. The *Monitor* slipped away from her like a barn-door sliding out from under the cutwater of a barge.

LIEUTENANT GREENE stood himself up painfully on his two legs. He was mad all through, and lunging toward the shot-rack, cupped his hands around that rejected wrought-iron shot. He was like David selecting the right pebble for his sling.

"Take it—and put two powder-bags in back of it," he cried to John Stocking in a white fury.

The gun-captain's teeth flashed as if they would fly out of his mouth. He dropped the forbidden cannon-ball into the two-handled iron shot-ladle held out to him stealthily by Joe Crown, the gunner's mate. He saw to it that two powder-bags were pressed, seam down, into the bottom of the Peacemaker's reeking bore.

This ball of iron weighed one hundred and sixty-eight pounds, but John Stocking lifted it lightly as a puff-ball to the gun's muzzle and rolled it in.

Outside, Thor's hammer was making a last effort to bash in this invulnerable turret. A rain of bolt-heads spun away from its inside wall. Lieutenant Greene felt an agonizing shock to his right groin. He gasped and sank against the gun's

breech. His voice was gone for the moment, and he motioned orders with his arms. . . . Run out the Peacemaker, was the command.

Lieutenant Greene put his two hands on the Peacemaker's swelling haunch. Thirty pounds of powder was a lot of powder. Would the gun be good for it? There was a way of finding out, and that was to touch off the gun! Now the port-lids were triced up. The lives of everybody in the turret hung by certain spider-lines that had been traced on Ericsson's drawing-board.

Lieutenant Greene fell back with the lock-string in his hand, and then heard John Stocking's voice close in his ear.

"Have you put the priming-wire in the vent, sir?"

The Lieutenant suffered a flush of mortification under his soot. He had had his head in the clouds, and it was the gun-captain's duty to remind him of errors and omissions, in the flurry of battle. He cleared the vent, and crouched again. Then through the narrow arc between the round of the gun and the top of the port, he saw one of the *Merrimac*'s ports pushed, it seemed, right into his lap. Its oaken frame was burning, and someone there was beating at it with a sponge.

Lieutenant Dan Greene unlatched the Peacemaker at the exact instant when the head of that furious enemy, bleeding at nose, mouth and ears, was turned toward him. Until now he had fought the *Merrimac* as if she were a kind of supernatural monster gouged up from the bottom of the sea, an octopus or giant sting-ray. Now he saw that she was human at her core. Worse, he knew that gunner with the sponge, recognized him for a friend—in the very instant that the Peacemaker spoke her piece.

Then he heard John Stocking's voice again. "She's good for it, sir. Gun's good for thirty pounds, all right. I think we bored him through that time."

She was good for it. . . . That bleeding head had been struck off.

Lieutenant Greene felt sickened. He dropped to his knees and plunged his head into the water swashing in the tub. It was hot and greasy, and full of grit from the sponges. He took hold of the edge of the tub, and stood himself up like something made of wood and animated by unseen devils.

Dan Toffey clutched his arm.

"The commander's wounded," the boy screeched.

Wounded? Worden wounded? Impossible! How could the commander of an invulnerable ship be hit?

"Is he hurt bad?"

"It's his eyes," Toffey sobbed. "He wants you forward."

"Here goes the contract," Lieutenant Greene thought bizarrely.

The safety of the men in the turret had been guaranteed. And now Lieutenant Worden had been hit. The ship had been pierced, then! He ran forward. Worden had lowered himself to the bottom of the pilot-house ladder, and stood swaying and hanging by the rungs.

To his executive the commander of the *Monitor* turned a terrible face. His beard was singed away, the lids were dropped over twitching eyeballs, and from every inch of those lids, and of the cheeks and brows, blood was oozing in fine drops. He had clapped his eye to the sight-hole, to con ship, and a shot from the *Merrimac*, a shell, had exploded against those massive iron logs, and driven an agony of powder and iron particles into the commander's eyes; the skin of one cheek was black with iron.

"That was a bad knock. . . . Sheer off!" Lieutenant Worden said.

Lieutenant Greene swung himself up into the pilot-house. That place was flooded with light. At the impact of the shell, the manhole cover at the top had snapped up, and flopping back, now covered only half its circle.

The Lieutenant looked into the compass-bowl.

"Sheer off," he said to the red Dane at the wheel. "Steer northwest."

"Steer northwest, sir," the Dane repeated in a dazed voice.

The Lieutenant dropped down to Worden's side, and for the first time saw Sam Howard standing there.

"I'll find the surgeon," Sam said. "I'll get Logue."

He ran aft, with his bad arm dangling; and the Lieutenant guided Worden into the captain's cabin, and let him sink down upon a sofa.

"Can you see me, sir?"

"I can see nothing," Worden said. "Where is the *Merrimac*?"

"We are going away from her."

"That won't do. She's yours now, Lieutenant. Take her back into action."

The alley outside the captain's cabin was full of a throng of naked imps, velvet black. There was a rumor that the ship had suffered fatal damage.

"What next, Lieutenant?" cried the fat Master-at-Arms, who was nearly as wide as the passage.

"Stations," Lieutenant Greene cried. "Stand to your guns, Stocking. Mr. Stimers, keep the turret turning. Mr. Howard, return to the pilot-house."

Isaac Newton pushed forward, with a dismal sag of his once-yellow whiskers.

"Boil the kettle," the Lieutenant said sharply. "I am in command."

"Boilers are foaming, sir," the engineer announced.

The *Merrimac* in her threshings had churned up mud, and this mud was a better protection to her than her guns. It had produced foaming in the *Monitor*'s boilers, and water was being carried over into the cylinders. There was a ruinous thump at the end of each stroke.

"What's the meaning of that?" Lieutenant Greene snapped.

"Too much water in the boilers. Not enough steam-room there. Engines will shake all to pieces, if I don't blow that water out," the engineer complained.

"Blow it out, then," the Lieutenant said, with that feeling of murderous rage which possesses a deck-officer at the failure of steam-machinery to function.

He went into the pilot-house, and saw that the *Merrimac* was steaming slowly away toward Craney Island.

"We've given her enough," said Acting Master Howard, making room for Lieutenant Greene behind the wheel.

"Enough? She's still afloat, isn't she?" Lieutenant Greene said bitterly. "It's no better than a drawn battle."

"I haven't read a Bible for sixteen years, but I'd like to thumb one over now," the Acting Master confessed. "I'll be greatly gloriously besotted if I didn't think she would roll over with us."

"You kicked off your shoes, I see," Lieutenant Greene said more calmly, his eye on the retreating *Merrimac*.

"I kicked them into the middle of next week," Sam Howard laughed sheepishly. "I got ready to dive, a second time."

His heels were shining through his stockings like a couple of crockery door-knobs.

"You've got a blister on your heel," the Lieutenant noted.

He felt that his sanity depended on a consideration of small things.

"The girl that knitted these socks for me made them big enough for Father Abraham," Sam said.

"What girl was that?"



"It's us poor craythurs of women, that suffer," said old Bridget McCarty.

"A girl in Baltimore," the Acting Master confessed, looking down his nose. "She meant well, but there's something about heels of stockings and elbows of stovepipes in this world that is all wrong. By God, Dan, if there is anything in life worse than unrequited love, it's a sore heel."

"You should know," Dan Greene muttered. "Baltimore, is it? I thought you had a girl in Washington."

"Who would that be?"

"Charlotte Breck."

"Charlotte? Didn't I warn you about her? Charlotte is too much woman for me," Sam Howard confessed. "I would have to live on a diet of bricks buttered with mortar to stand up to Charlotte."

"Is she that hard?"

"Good God," Sam burst forth, seeing that the Lieutenant's eye was on the ribbon round his throat, "here is something Charlotte gave me to give you when I saw you, and I clean forgot. I've cracked it all to pieces slamming up against the turret."

"The beggar is lying to me," the Lieutenant thought, feeling a cloud settle on his victory.

"Here," Sam said, putting the pieces carefully into his friend's hand, "here it

is, a token right from the land of kid gloves, white bosoms and gold toothpicks. Make the most of it. This scalp's all you'll get near to for some time, I suspicion."

Like Elijah, who had crouched in a cave during the tempest, the earthquake and the fire, Lieutenant Greene now listened to the still small voice.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIEUTENANT GREENE lay in his bunk with his boots off, but there was no sleep in him. His eyes flamed. The muscles of his neck twitched as if galvanic shocks were being sent through his worn body; his throat was ragged out; guns were going off again inside his head.

But the Peacemaker itself had cooled. The *Monitor* was anchored again under the *Minnesota*'s counter, and Lieutenant Worden had gone ashore for treatment.

At three bells the dark-bearded Lieutenant Selfridge came aboard.

"That was a big job of fighting," he said composedly. "You gave her a good pounding, man."

"It was like a couple of old-fashioned knights jousting," Greene replied discontentedly. "Fight all day, and neither man hurt."

"But what made you cut your luck?" asked the tall Lieutenant Selfridge.

Greene stared at him.

"What's that, sir?"

"You know. Skedaddle. What sent you out of action?"

"Mud," Lieutenant Greene muttered, with a bleak look. "Mud in the boilers. . . . We had a black cat that wandered aboard," he added, as if that might explain something.

"I have a note for you from Mr. Fox, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy," Selfridge said.

He put into Greene's hand a missive written on pale blue paper. The Lieutenant opened it. His eyes just jumped over the words like spent shot, touching and skipping.

"My dear Mr. Greene. . . . Under the extraordinary circumstances contest just passed responsibility devolving on me your extreme youth . . . I have suggested send on board the *Monitor* as temporary commanding officer . . . Lieutenant Selfridge."

Lieutenant Greene dropped this paper on the Captain's table. So—they had replaced him! They had found him out.

Somebody had reported that he had thrown wrought-iron shot, against the express stipulation of the Bureau of Ordnance. More than likely they had traced him back to the very moment of his fatal slip with Charlotte Breck. The loss of two ships and three hundred lives was price enough to pay for a moment's indiscretion. Charlotte had drawn him out, posted off to Richmond, and got the *Merrimac* into action a day early.

"Are there any night orders, sir?" he asked wearily.

"You are wanted ashore if you feel up to it," Selfridge said. "Report to Lieutenant Breck at his house, the Portico."

"To Lieutenant Breck," Greene repeated. He passed his hand over his eyes. "Yes sir. I'll take a man along to lean on, if I may. I've got a crick in the leg."

He had himself set ashore with John Rooney, and stumped along painfully, dragging his bad leg. A drumhead court-martial would be the next thing waiting for him, he supposed. Egyptian darkness filled his soul. A twinkle of campfires marked the shore batteries; a smell of coffee drifted into his nostrils. Somebody sang out, "Where to, Pegleg?" and Lieutenant Greene answered darkly: "Snapping down to hell in a hemlock coffin." The voice yelled after him: "Skulls are going at ten dollars apiece."

Skulls were at the bottom of it, right enough. Nevertheless, after the gyrations of the turret, the fixity of the earth felt good. Lieutenant Greene stumped on, and when he came to the Portico, he found it all a blaze of light. A sentry conferred with him and let him pass.

"Wait here, Rooney," he muttered.

Old Cradle opened the door to him. The Negro servant was in a black coat and a white bosom ruffled out like a loose headsail. His eyes sparkled worshipfully; he looked like a man on the point of deaconing out hymns.

"Yes sah. Come right in, sah. Have a cheer," said Cradle, backing in as far as the sweep of the stairs. "Is you wounded bad, sah?"

"No. Just tell Lieutenant Breck that Lieutenant Greene has come."

Old Cradle vanished, and Lieutenant Greene sank into a high-backed chair. His eyes traveled up the stair-risers. These were the very stairs that Charlotte Breck had glorified with her light footsteps, coming down to meet him with her fan dragging on the rail. Now she had got as far away from him as the stars.

In the room on his right there was a rustle of papers and the dry voice of the surgeon on duty dictating an official description of his patients: "Matthias Sawyer . . . contused wound of upper left breast — expectorating blood — not much constitutional disturbance. . . . Logan Metts—slight flesh wound, middle third of left leg, external surface. . . . John Mills, penetrating shell wound in posterior aspect of forearm, one and one half inches from the beam process to outer side—joint perhaps implicated—"

Lieutenant Greene thought amazedly: "They are measuring our remains. Must have a use for us still."

The Portico was filled with survivors from the *Congress* and the *Cumberland*. There were groans from the rooms above. Lieutenant Greene felt as if his head were spiked to his shoulders, and as if his heart might burst in his throat. His sense of dereliction increased a thousand-fold. He was taking blows worse than any that had fallen on the *Monitor's* turret. The cries of this torture-chamber could all be laid at his door.

"Francis Mooring, compound fracture of left thigh—mortal," the surgeon's voice went on, and added in an aside: "These hot shell-fragments burn the soft parts of a man's body right away."

"Right dis yere way, sah," old Cradle was saying in the Lieutenant's other ear.

THE door on the left was standing open, and Lieutenant Greene saw Warfield Breck sitting at a desk, with a long cheroot in his mouth.

"Just come in, will you, Lieutenant?" Breck called cheerfully. "You will find whisky in that decanter on the sideboard."

"He's kissing me on both cheeks before he kills me off," the Lieutenant reflected gloomily.

Nevertheless he poured himself a stiff drink, and tossed it off. He felt better, and sat down, favoring his injured leg as much as possible.

Lieutenant Breck wrote a few rapid sentences, and dusted sand on the wet ink out of a salt-shaker.

He looked up with a disarming smile.

"Your little ship saved the *Minnesota*, Lieutenant," he said candidly. "Let me apologize at once for any aspersions I have cast on that gallant little battery of yours. Good God, sir, you have won a smashing victory!"

"I don't know. She slipped away from us," the Lieutenant said.

"She simply cut stick," Warfield Breck exulted.

"He must have some reason for singing small this way," Greene thought.

"You hear these poor fellows groaning," Breck went on. "There would have been double their number tonight if you had not got between us and the *Merrimac*. She came to grind our bones, and she has had to limp away."

"Limp? I don't know. She's not badly hurt. If we could use thirty pounds of powder for a charge, sir—"

"Fifteen will have to satisfy you," Warfield Breck said. He added: "You will be glad to learn that Lieutenant Worden won't lose his eyesight."

"That is good news," cried Greene.

"The very best," Breck said, shuffling his papers. He leaned across the desk. "But for a man who has covered himself with glory, as you have, Lieutenant, you look a little glum."

Lieutenant Greene said at once: "It appears there is dissatisfaction with my conduct. I have been relieved of my command."

"Of your command," Breck repeated, smiling. "Yes, of course—you were in command for half an hour. But the *Monitor* is now the most important naval vessel in the world. She must have an experienced man."

Greene said nothing at all.

"We were all mistaken in the *Monitor*," Breck went on graciously, with the effect of unbosoming himself to his subordinate. "Even President Lincoln said that you don't send a pollywog to catch a whale. But I had another thing in mind in calling you ashore. A squad of Rebels has come in bringing Lieutenant Joseph Smith's sword, under a flag of truce."

"His sword?" Greene repeated.

It was Joe's sword, then, that was lying on Breck's desk.

"It seems you were right," Breck said, with just the ghost of a break in his voice. "It wasn't Smith who ran up the white flag. He was seen in the gig that pulled away from her, but he had been propped up there by a friend, as if still living and only wounded. Naturally, dead men wouldn't be allowed to take up space, with so many brave men in the water. Lieutenant Smith was dead, with a bullet through his heart."

"I knew him well," Lieutenant Greene murmured.

"You were his friend," Warfield Breck stated. "It has seemed fitting that you,

sir, should be the man to take his sword to his father in Washington, along with these dispatches."

Lieutenant Greene felt as if a barbed hook had got into his vitals.

Evidently his audacity in doubling the powder-charge had been reported to this hypocrite, who had one foot in Richmond and the other in Washington. Lieutenant Breck wanted a more cautious man to pit against the *Merrimac*. As for the sword, Lieutenant Greene could see Charlotte's hand in that. He had envied Joe this sword. Now he had it, at a dear bargain, with Joe's blood on it; that too was Charlotte's work, the last twist of her betrayal.

He picked the sword up gingerly and half drew it from its scabbard, then let it go back with a screeching ring of steel.

"Are there any further orders, sir?" he asked.

"No," said Breck. "Merely to say that the tug *Zouave* is waiting for you."

The tug was waiting, and in Washington the old Commodore was waiting for news of his son, and young Greene would bring him his son's sword, and say that he had come too late to save his life. Too late! Why, he had as good as killed Joe with his own hand, by looking into a girl's eyes, shilly-shallying in a music-room when he ought to have denounced her to the world!

Dragging his bad leg out at the Portico's door, Lieutenant Greene found it hard to take the view that all's fair in love and war. He had made a fool of himself, or worse; and now blood was running everywhere like water on a wash-deck morning, and the world was evil to its core.

Rooney clutched his arm.

"Is it a sword they've been after presenting to you, sor?"

"A dead man's sword," the Lieutenant muttered.

Joe Smith had taken this disguise to haunt him, he decided. Cold sweat was on his face, and he stopped short, leaned against a paddock fence.

THREE was the sound of cavalry horses frisking in the field, then the tapping of a cane. A brisk old lady came toward him, her face shadowed by a poke bonnet. Chicken-skin gloves covered her hands, rough brogans were on her feet. She had a basket on her back.

"Would a foine young man the likes of you be having a drop of whisky on his person for an miserable ould sowl as

is perishing of thirst, and her jist coming through the lines and lying out all night in a swamp?" she cried.

"No whisky, mother," he said.

"Then let you be giving me a lift down with this basket of stockings for the sojers."

Dan Greene unslung the basket from her shoulders.

"Are they well-knit?" he asked, thinking of Sam Howard. "There's nothing worse than a sore heel, unless it's unrequited love."

The old lady clutched his wrist.

"And is it you do be speaking of unrequited love—a foine young man with the sword in his two hands? The devil takes care of his own, I always heard. It's us poor craythurs of women that suffer, and not young gentlemin the likes of you."

She took off her green spectacles, and he saw Charlotte Breck's eyes above cheeks stained with ochre.

"Walk on a hundred paces, Rooney," he said.

"Ay-ay, sir."

The Master-at-Arms moved on obediently to the far end of the paddock fence.

"What kind of woman are you?" the Lieutenant demanded, turning to Charlotte.

"As many kinds of women as the law requires," Charlotte said. "I have been a canal-boat girl, and a proud lady named Laura Stark who came from New Orleans and moved in the best Richmond circles. And once I was a young man, even—a letter-carrier with passports through the lines. Dan, I think I liked that best."

"You are a spy," Lieutenant Greene said heavily.

"At your service," Charlotte cried. "Was I just to sit at home and knit and write verses on my fan? Dan, my dear, now you do have your look of Edgar Allan Poe! Well, then, it's true I am a spy. A spy of Uncle Gideon's."

"Of Uncle Gideon's?"

"Of our Secretary of the Navy. You can't believe what damnable things I have done. Dan, I gave Joe Smith my sword, I even let him make love to me; but I did it to get closer to his father."

"To the Commodore," Lieutenant Greene muttered.

"The old Commodore, with his fears and his fidgets, would have put a new rudder on the *Monitor* when the first one worked badly. He would have held her up a month if I had not brought

him news from Richmond that the *Merrimac* was nearly ready."

"It was you who—" The Lieutenant faltered, and then could not go on at all. It was harder to get his bearings now than in that black turret which had changed the destinies of the world and shifted the balance of power in the seven oceans.

"I told him Joe's life was at stake, and so he let the *Monitor* go as she was," Charlotte cried passionately. "And after all, you came too late for Joe. His beautiful frigate was no more than candy, as you said it would be. . . . Joe is dead and out of it."

"I have his sword here," the Lieutenant said hollowly.

"His sword," Charlotte whispered, touching the hilt with her pale fingers. "He died so bravely—and you knew it. When I saw the white flag on the *Congress*, I thought that Joe—I thought—But you knew that he was dead. You had faith in him."

"But not in you," said Greene.

HE heard Charlotte catch her breath; her head sank a little.

"Why should you have faith in me? I am twenty women in one."

"You were seen in Richmond."

"I was seen— Oh, poor Dan! So there were you, the bold conqueror that had laid siege, and you were left sitting in the smoking ruins and asking yourself if it was worth while to rebuild. Well, it's true I have been in Richmond. There's a man there who has faith in me, even if you hadn't."

The Lieutenant could not tell the thudding of horses' hoofs in the paddock from the beating of his own heart.

"Who is he?"

"A stranger. My dress was caught on his sword at a dance—oh, quite accidentally, of course. That was how he came to know me. If I had a pencil, I could draw him for you, to a hair. If I shut my eyes now, I can paint him on my eyelids. He haunts me a little, I confess."

"No doubt he kissed you," the Lieutenant suggested thickly.

"Kisses are women's casualties," Charlotte murmured, with a trace of her old irony. "But it was Laura Stark, he kissed. I suppose he had to be in love a little. Would he have let slip the *Merrimac*'s sailing-date to just a girl who had caught her skirt on his sword?"

"I had rehearsed you well, it seems."

"I think you did give me the idea. Dan, do you see how wholly this victory of the *Monitor* is yours? But it was Charlotte Breck that you rehearsed, and who could find her now? If I should come face to face with her myself, I wouldn't know her."

"But tonight—"

"Tonight she is Bridget McCarty, because old women are safer than young ones, going through the lines. In Richmond, she will be Laura Stark again."

"Why must you go back?"

"Why must you go to Washington with Joe Smith's sword?"

"Orders."

"You see? I have orders too. I am ordered to find out how badly you have mauled the *Merrimac*."

"I see. And your friend in Richmond will tell you."

"I count on him."

"What's his name?"

"Frank Cates."

"Cates!" Greene cried out.

"Then you know him?"

"He was my room-mate at Annapolis," he said. "But you will not be meeting him tonight."

"But he expects me."

"No. . . . He is dead."

"How can you know that?" she whispered.

"I have killed him. Today," the Lieutenant said. "I pulled the lock-string—the same second that I saw his face."

HE felt rather than saw the shudder that went through Charlotte's body. He dragged the bonnet from her head, and looked into her face. Flaxen curls, thickly powdered, were crushed against her cheeks; the eyes were still the color of wet violets, but they had an apathetic look.

"Well, I have no tears for him," she said strangely. "When I have to cry, these days, I shake black pepper in my handkerchief. . . . I have killed him."

"That is the bond between us," the Lieutenant said. "I suppose you made it quite clear to him that you—" he was beginning again, and then stopped short.

"Quite clear. I had to put my heart in it," Charlotte said. She laughed wildly. "You see, so much depended on me. And in war, women must use all their arts. You have killed Cates, you say. You must really be more careful, Lieutenant. Now I shall have to begin again at the beginning. I shall have to go

looking for another sword to catch my skirt on."

"A sword," the Lieutenant said numbly. He looked at Joe Smith's sword.

"Ah, not Joe's sword. That has done its duty," Charlotte cried, and her lips trembled, and she clasped her fingers round that hilt, as if this might be the angel's flaming sword that could divide them with a stroke.

IT seemed to Dan Greene that her hair grated against his cheek, that her breast rose against him as if the wounded heart struggled to be free. But almost in the same second she had slipped away, and snatched her bonnet from the ground, where he had dropped it.

"Let you be putting the basket on my poor back again," she cried, in the voice of Bridget McCarty. She waved her cane at some moving object on the ground. "What's this again? Sure, it's a black cat it is, strolling about wid no place to lay its poor head. Give the innocent craythur here into me hand."

For the Master-at-Arms was coming toward them sheepishly.

"Begging your pardon, sor," Rooney said. "I brought that divil of a battle-cat ashore in me pocket, and still and all I hadn't the heart to set it down in a strange land. Bad cess to it, it follies a man's shadow like bad luck."

"Sorra the day," said Bridget McCarty, crouched over her cane. "Well, and an ould woman at the ind of her days can hardly be thinking of bad luck. Pop the little thing into me basket here. If it was a gypsy, now, I was," she cried at Dan, "I'd be saying there was one unbeknownst to ye—a light girl wid no conscience—that loves ye well enough. Whisht, away wid ye! There's work for me this night."

Her brogans scuffed on the red soil, and she was gone with the black cat in her basket, toward Richmond.

"Bedad, she's one of the rale ould stock of Irish bog-trotters, with the Irish hood and Irish heart of her," Rooney cried. "Flax, is it? Cats are lucky for you, Lieutenant, I'll be thinking."

Lieutenant Greene leaned hard against the Master-at-Arms. His devotion to Charlotte Breck was mixed with gratitude. She had made an end of his suspicions.

Suddenly, with all its sad and heavy meaning, Joe Smith's sword felt lighter in his hand.

REAL EXPERIENCES



An Old Guard pilot who has won fame as a writer—"Attack" and "High Frontier" in the Saturday Evening Post, and many stories in this magazine—confesses that he once went to sleep on the job.

By LELAND
JAMIESON

Vigil in the Sky

PROBABLY the narrowest escape I ever had while flying the night mail came not from bad weather, mechanical failure of the plane or engine, or even from my own ineptness in piloting, but from fatigue. Even thinking of it now I shiver at how close a thing it was.

With the air-mail contract cancellations in February, 1934, the entire industry was thrown into confusion. Each air line, deprived suddenly of what at that time was its most dependable source of income, fought to maintain passenger schedules, to hold its maintenance and piloting personnel intact, and to weather what in every case was an acute financial crisis. Then, in the summer of that year, with the awarding of new contracts, the former confusion became for a short time practically chaos. Some lines found themselves suddenly out of existence; others were much as they had been before; others had new routes and greatly increased route mileage to fly—and were temporarily without enough pilots or equipment to handle such rapid expansion.

The line I was with was one of these. In the days—and nights—after the renewal of air-mail operations, every pilot was called on to fly almost as much as he could physically endure. In those days there was no regulation of maximum flying hours in single-engine, single-pilot mail planes; this contribution to air safety came with the advent of passenger

operations. Fatigue was a factor that nobody had ever given much thought to. Pilots had been killed in crashes that could not easily be explained, but it was always assumed that something went wrong with their planes. The year before the time of which I write, my older brother had been one of these casualties: "Cause of crash unexplained; probably mechanical failure."

I had never believed his death could have come from any other cause. And yet it remained for me, in the narrowest of a number of narrow escapes, to prove that it could have been fatigue.

I had taken a special load of mail from Atlanta to Miami the night before this—619 miles, between 8:30 P.M. and 3:30 A.M., pushing a Pitcairn mailwing at 100 miles an hour—then, with no sleep at all, had turned right back to Atlanta to buck a stiff wind and arrive just before noon. A hot lunch and an afternoon's sleep looked awfully good to me when I landed.

But I didn't get either of them. Three other pilots happened to be at the airport; they were rounding up everybody for a pilots' meeting. Finally, just in time for a late dinner, I got home. Ellen, my wife, who was used to seeing me after I had flown all night, gave me a concerned scrutiny. She had always warned me against getting too tired.

"You're certainly no rose!" she exclaimed jokingly. "Are you still due out on your regular run tomorrow night?"

"Unless I get fired before then," I said.

"If you're fired, you won't find out about it. I'm going to take off the telephone receiver, and you can sleep all night and all day."

"Good," I said. I was too tired to say anything more. I nodded through dinner and then fell into bed, thinking that no matter how strong you are, twelve hundred miles in less than twenty-four hours in a slow, open ship would make an old man of you. Then I was asleep.

AND then Ellen was shaking me insistently, and I was vaguely aware of the self-reproach in her voice, and the worry too. "Wake up," she was saying. "I forgot to lift the receiver. It's the field calling—it's Joe Blake, and he says it's important."

"Nothing's important now except sleep," I said, and looked at my wrist-watch. It was eleven, and I'd been asleep almost three hours.

"Here's the phone," Ellen said, and put it into my hand. Very sleepily, not at all interested, I said, "Hello."

A voice said, "Leland?" It was Joe Blake, the night dispatcher, all right. He sounded upset and he sounded badgered, as if he'd had more trouble tonight than one man could handle. "Leland? Can you take Trip Eight to Chicago for me?"

"No," I said. "Not for you or anyone else. I'm asleep!" Then I made the concession of asking, "What's the matter out there?"

"George Scott ran his car into a culvert and got his head cut," Joe explained. "Had to go to the hospital. Somebody's got to take Trip Eight north from here."

"Okay," I said, and then added some choice opinions of George Scott and Joe Blake too, and hung up. "What a way to make a living!" I said bitterly to Ellen. She was sitting there on the edge of my bed, giving me a straight, almost scared look. "What," I demanded, "is the matter with you?"

"You," she said, and the word was almost explosive. "You're in no shape to fly anywhere. You need some rest!"

"I'll be all right," I said, and gave her a grin. We'd been through this before, in the Army, and at other times since. She had always been a good sport about my flying; she'd been a good soldier. But my brother's death had shaken her somewhat, just as it had me; and she couldn't always conceal her feelings when I was starting on a tough run. Being a pilot's wife, in those days, wasn't all fun.

She didn't argue; she never did, when a trip had to be made, because what was the use? For a few moments she watched me dress, and then went down and fixed scrambled eggs and black coffee. While I ate, she sat across the kitchen table, not saying much. I could feel that she didn't want me to go, and I didn't want to go either.

"After all, kitten," I suddenly said, feeling the need to say something, "it's my job. Do you want me to quit?" I sounded silly to myself; I knew, of course, that she didn't want that. But as I watched her smile and shake her head, I wondered if she'd had a hunch about this night. And for some strange reason I was afraid to ask.

"Good luck," she said at the door.

"Sure," I answered. "Nothing else ever, kitten. And you get some sleep." I went on out to the car. Then, for a minute I almost went back and confronted her with the question; I'd been afraid to ask awhile ago—because for a minute I had a definite feeling that this wasn't my night to be flying. But rather than scare her, I drove on out to the field. There was a full moon. It was a beautiful bright night with the moon glow thick in the haze. Recollection suddenly hit me, making my skin tingle, that it had been on a moonlit night, just such a night as this, a year ago, that my brother had taken off on his last trip with the mail.

TWENTY minutes later I took off, climbing straight into the south until I had four hundred feet, and then circling quickly and flattening out on my course. As I went over my house at nine hundred feet, I eased back on the throttle momentarily, a last "good-night" signal to Ellen, who, though I told her to, never quite got to sleep until she heard me roar overhead. Then, the sharp outline of tree-covered hills merging into the moon-mist below, I settled into a climb that did not cease until my altimeter showed five thousand feet. From there I could jump if anything happened; there I felt perfectly safe.

A quick descent and landing at Chattanooga; a slow climb over Missionary Ridge, over the shimmering Tennessee River, over Signal Mountain and Suck Creek Canyon—and then once more the earth became vague in the haze far below. The stimulating tension of the first hour was beginning to wear away, displaced by the fatigue I'd forgotten. By the time I reached Murfreesboro, just out of

VIGIL IN THE SKY

Nashville, I knew I'd be worn out long before Chicago showed on the horizon. I was already, for some reason, exceedingly hungry; and there was no place to get food at this time of night.

DAYLIGHT found me pushing north over the Kentucky hills, "dragging my feet" in a stiff headwind, at four o'clock in the morning. It was sun-up by the time I got out of Louisville; sun-up and hot at three thousand feet, where the mildest headwind now was. With the long night behind me, I relaxed. More accurately, I collapsed in my seat. The slow, tortured miles crawled underneath. Seymour, Indiana, showed over the hammering engine and slid under the nose. I was yawning repeatedly now. The desire for sleep was an insidious agony; there was a feeling of sand in my eyes, and the lids repeatedly dropped shut despite every effort to keep them open. It was still more than two hours to Chicago, and I found myself wondering how I could last that long. For of course I had to keep going.

All thought of danger from drowsiness had been forgotten in the physical demand for sleep. . . . I awoke with a start, suddenly aware of the roaring exhaust in my ears, suddenly aware that I was flying an airplane. A wing was down slightly. I was ten degrees off my course and had gained one hundred feet. Those discoveries, however, were of slight interest to me, compared to the sudden observance of my position. Seymour had been underneath a moment ago; now it was out of sight in the morning haze behind, and I had flown fifteen miles in a stuporous daze. I spit on my fingers and rubbed my eyes, feeling a little shocked, feeling that I should be alarmed and frightened, but somehow not able to react that way. I didn't care. All I wanted was sleep.

At Indianapolis the airport restaurant was not open and I could get nothing to eat. The station crew had finished their coffee, so I could beg none to give me renewed alertness. I had to dog the trip through somehow without any help.

So, filled with a vast emptiness and a stubborn determination to remain awake at any cost, I took off. But at altitude it was humanly impossible to fight off sleep. I dozed repeatedly. The singular observation that this sort of flying was hazardous was no stimulation whatever; it seemed only amusing. By that time I had only one interest—to

reach Chicago and get to sleep. I was too sleepy even to be interested in food any longer.

But, because I dozed repeatedly at altitude, I decided to descend to two hundred feet, in the hope that the greater sensation of speed at lower altitude—to say nothing of the much greater actual danger of inattention—would help me to remain awake. I was in sheer agony until I leveled off at two hundred feet, after which, with the Indiana countryside rushing past, I felt better. Lebanon slid under my wing; I was now only 140 miles from Chicago. After an infinite drag of time against miles, I saw Lafayette over the nose. Another hundred miles would bring me to my destination, but that would require an hour—

Suddenly I heard the engine's roar burst violently against my senses, and I realized dully that once more I had dozed. I tried to shake complete consciousness back into my brain. I looked down to see where Lafayette was.

It was nowhere in view. Under me as far as I could see on all sides was—water. . . .

For a minute I sat there, unable to believe this astonishing sight. This was Lake Michigan, of course—yet my mind told me it simply could not be. The last thing I had seen had been Lafayette, Indiana—one hundred miles from Lake Michigan. Could I possibly have slept while I flew that distance? It seemed fantastic, impossible. But I knew it was true. Like a soldier marching in his sleep, putting one foot in front of the other by sheer reflex action, I had flown an airplane for an hour, somehow watching where I was going enough to avoid diving into the ground. I could remember nothing since Lafayette.

I TURNED west, climbing rapidly, fully awake in a shocked, bewildered, incredulous way. Conviction was strong in my mind suddenly of what had happened to my brother a year ago; he had gone to sleep too, flying low; his landing gear had clipped a tall tree and he had crashed before he knew what he had hit.

I would have done the same thing if a tall tree had been in my way. Sitting there, seeing Chicago finally materialize as a smoke smudge in the southwest, I wondered what trees or silos or smokestacks I had narrowly missed. I am still wondering.

A Royal Ransom

A fascinating—and businesslike—search for sunken treasure.

By LT. HARRY
RIESEBERG

IT was late in March, and the air was clear and sharp. The scene was San Francisco's waterfront; our schooner was the *Hispaniola*, outward-bound, off to seek sunken treasure—a royal traitor's hoard that had rested in Davy Jones' keeping for nearly three hundred years!

The record of the treasure our expedition was sailing off to seek was obtained from the musty and dust-laden files of the Spanish State Archives at Madrid, and the Museum of Lima, in Peru. The scene goes back to the year 1680, when the son of King Charles I of England lost a vast treasure of some thirty million pieces-of-eight, together with a large consignment of gold and silver bullion, in the treacherous waters off the coast of Ecuador. This disaster was at that period in history when King Charles was making a desperate struggle to regain the throne of England, and a temporary truce between Spain and England was in effect.

To make this temporary peace with her former enemy more lasting and of a permanent nature, the king of Spain ordered the merchants of Lima, Peru—Spain's wealthiest colonial possession—to consign to King Charles' son, and agent for his father, as a present of good will and to aid his father's cause in his war with the people of England, some "thirty million pieces of eight," together with a vast quantity of silver plate and gold bullion. The craft chosen to transport this princely treasure from Lima to Panama, where it would be carried overland and then shipped by an armed convoy to England, was the *Santa Cruz*—a stately galleon equipped with seventy guns.

Hardly out of sight of the Peruvian coast, the galleon struck a terrific storm, and was stranded on the Los Ahorcados reefs in the Bay of Manta. There she went to pieces, and carried down to the bottom her officers, crew and the Spanish silver and gold. The location of the ill-fated galleon's sinking, as given in the musty archives of ancient date, cites:

3 leagues from Solango are 2 rocks called Los Ahorcados, there appear both high and dark besides these, N. N. E. from Point St. Helena, is a high rock which to windward thereof runs shoaling for the space of one-half mile under water it is a distance about 8 leagues from the said point, and is called Chanduy at this place and upon this rock was lost the ship the rock lies 2 leagues distant from the main.

Thus from these records it appeared that the wreck lay about nine miles offshore from Point Santa Helena. In this particular area the coast is ringed round by the sides of a mountain which descends very near the shore, and the winds and tides are extremely difficult for salvaging operations. However, even at this late date, after heavy storms at sea, the natives often gather from the sands of near-by beaches pieces-of-eight, sometimes a gold peso, and now and then a darkened doubloon. It was this latter fact, the finding of these ancient coins, that enticed and decided us to make the attempted search for the balance, if any, of this vast fortune in Spanish treasure.

The hulk of the famous galleon, of course, long years ago had ceased to guard its treasure and washed away, piece by piece, out to sea. But the treasure, due to its weight, we believed, must still lie where the galleon went down. Therefore we did not seek, as most treasure-salvors usually do, a galleon intact with its vast treasure.

Searching for the resting-place of the *Santa Cruz* was a problem that had baffled navigators and seamen for years. Days of cruising over what seemed the most likely spots proved useless. Many wrecks were found by the dragging kedge-anchors and the location-finders, but none was the particular hulk we were in search of. For several days a gale blew, which retarded our work. Then finally, on the tenth day, we were over the spot where we had decided to make our explorations. Lying under a cloudless sky, the sea showed scarcely a ripple on its surface, and so transparent was the water that the

bottom at six to ten fathoms appeared within reach of one's outstretched hand, with every detail standing out sharply.

"Drop anchor!"

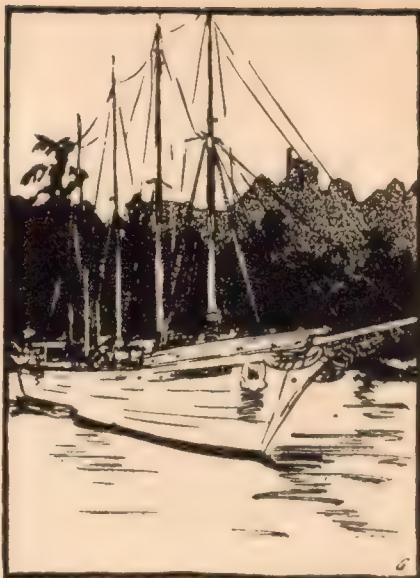
The sphere was made ready for the descent to the bottom. This ultra-modern type of diving robot was a strange device, a mass of cold iron, with a set of three powerful electric lights each on the nine-foot arms and the other in the head, which throws a beam some one hundred feet, depending on the waters in which it may be working, into the murky gloom of the deep void. Behind it, as it rested awaiting its occupant, were the winches and drums which controlled the reeling out and in of the steel cable by which the iron monster was lowered or raised. The electrician was now ready to give the signal—calm, methodical. Several seamen were adjusting the ropes and cables; the engineer now thrust his begrimed face from out the door of the engine-room waiting for his signal to start the engines.

I crawled into the door of the sphere-robot. Swiftly the watertight trap was closed, locked and screwed down. A moment more and the ungainly robot was unleashed from the brackets against the bulwarks. The signal was given! The winches groaned; the drums turned—and the robot was lifted from the deck; it swung up, over the side of the schooner and slowly sank beneath the surface.

AS they lowered me within the all-metal ball and paid out the length of cable, from out of the sphere's vision-plates I caught glimpses of curious fish. They slipped up to me and then drifted easily away. Down, down I went through the still, green waters. Gradually the light grew fainter, the water duller, darker. Within the sphere it was as still as the inside of a locked vault—somewhat like being within the hollowed-out interior of a gigantic golf-ball; only the golf-ball in this case was much taller than the average man and weighed thirty-nine hundred pounds, with a four-and-a-half-foot diameter.

As the robot gradually dropped, foot by foot, the waters, treacherous currents and strange tides of the locality swished it slowly about. Presently the electrician on deck began to talk into the phone, the other end of which was attached to my head by a snap-band.

"How far down am I?" I inquired over my phone as I touched bottom. The winchman sang out, "Sixty fathoms!"



At that depth the formation seemed to be almost black in color in this particular area, while the fish were multi-colored, hundreds of them. It became a bit chilly within the sphere; then it warmed up—due to the peculiar currents along the coast of South America. I was moved along at my request; and as I moved, I noticed a bulky mass, hidden as it was by the accumulation of sea-growths and half buried in the sand; it was the remains of a very ancient ship, indeed—a vessel whose rotted and broken timbers still showed traces of a lofty stern-castle with high bluff bows.

As I poked about with my iron-be-clawed hands, I came upon two ornate shell-encrusted cannon. There was no doubt that I had stumbled upon the wreck of a Spanish or Portuguese galleon or caravel of the Sixteenth or Seventeenth Century. Only by striking every object with the iron claws was it possible for me to determine which were natural growths and which were portions of the wrecked ship. Tearing away the masses of weeds and barnacles upon the gaunt timbers, I was dropped between the massive ribs of the wreck, where I dug away the sand that half filled the old hulk. Inch by inch the wreck was worked over, finding, after breaking off encrustations of shell and barnacles and other accumulated deposits, a bundle of rent and twisted ironwork, hatch-bands, chain, iron plates, toggles, a massive iron ring that had once held the water sail-yard beneath the ancient galleon's bowsprit.

Little by little the hulk was worked over. Then some gear that looked like

standing rigging, but was not, was discovered; then pile after pile of mounds which were found to be former kegs of nails, with not a nail remaining, but each nail had left a perfect mold in the mass of iron oxide that had encrusted and formed a shell about them.

Next was discovered a kettle, crudely made, no doubt hand-forged, with five riveted pronged legs. A shell-encrusted iron grapnel which, no doubt, had once been in the ancient craft's long-boat; and some metal plates on which the galleon's crew had once been fed. A grindstone, worn and out of shape, on which possibly many a knife and sword had once been sharpened, or perhaps some Spanish don's halberd—and other articles, many of whose uses were a mystery to me.

THE descent the next morning—the twelfth day at the reefs—caused some excitement on board the schooner. While below, I uncovered almost immediately upon reaching the bottom a huge lump which I sent up by the cable in the steel sling. I reported over the phone that I thought it might be treasure of some sort. When it was swung onto the deck, chisels and hammers smashed into the formation with which it was thickly encased. There was the dull gleam of yellow.

"Gold! Gold! We have found it!" shouted those on deck.

That strange madness that grips men when gold and silver treasure is at stake seemed to permeate the surroundings on deck above. They grabbed each other and danced, and yelled madly. But fortune was not so easily found, for as the find was finally uncovered, it turned out to be an immense copper kettle with huge bronze legs, a long spout and was built up of many sheets of thin copper varying in thicknesses and riveted together, as many such utensils were constructed in the Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries.

I was now on the spot where the stern of the galleon had at one time rested, and I now felt that luck was with me and the jinx that seemed to guard sunken treasure in lost ship was gone. Then suddenly through my vision-plates within my beam there showed a dark cleft in the jagged slime-covered rock formation on my right. I remembered the first time I had seen this same sight—this same monster of the deep; then my knees felt weak.

It was a gray, repulsive-looking mass with long snaky arms! A giant squid—an octopus! True, it was one of the largest that I had ever seen; its giant ten-

tacles seemed to be, through my vision-glass, at least ten feet in length. It crawled along a natural trough leading from its lair, raising itself on its many-cupped tentacles like some huge tarantula. My three light-beams now glowed directly on the slimy creature.

The octopus abruptly raised itself on its long snaky arms, moving quickly toward the robot—one long arm lashed out madly, struck the sphere, shaking it as a dog would a rat. Seven other arms then madly thrashed about the robot, frenziedly. One curved about the dome and obscured temporarily the vision-plates, all four of them; its flesh hideously magnified. Inky defense fluid clouded the water, spewed by the infuriated beast. Slashing tentacles beat the water, as the writhing arms sought its prey. The beams of light now helped me little to see into the murky and clouded water which the monster's arms still thrashed—seeking the man within—writhing, spewing more inky fluid in its mad endeavor to crush the robot.

The creature was curious to get its arms inside the device and see just what made this new gadget tick. Again and again the beast circled its snaky arms about the robot, feinting, advancing, retreating, gripping. Within the sphere, watching these maneuvers, the thought came to me of the fabled treasures of old guarded by a dragon.

Suddenly one of the long tentacles shot out and wrapped itself about the right-hand toggle-jointed arms of my robot. I peered at it, then caught my breath—I gripped the lever within the robot; the beclawed grips at the end of the arm clamped, closed on the tentacle wrapped about it—and the slimy tentacle was severed! Bubbles swirled upward.

Then, in its mad frenzy, the beast wrapped another of its tentacles about the claw. Again I clamped the claws—and another of the beast's arms was disconnected. Again a jet of inky fluid was creeping through the greenly transparent water. Writhing, spewing its inky barrage, the giant octopus tried to squeeze the iron ball. Then suddenly the beast ceased its writhing.

I was again hauled to the surface.

ON the following day I went down again, this time with blasts connected to the wire and held tightly between the fingers of my claws. After clawing and digging about, a suitable place was located to spot the fuse. Mak-

ing sure that it was well-set, I quickly made the ascent to the surface and was swung on board the schooner. Sails were then hoisted, and the *Hispaniola* slowly moved to a safe distance. The plunger was shoved home. For a moment, there was a silence. Then a dull smothered thundering sound was faintly heard, and a small column of water shot into the air.

Two hours later I was on my way down to the bottom again, the steel sling following me. Torn loose from their sea-bed grave and tomb by the explosion, were parts of firearms and weapons, broken dishes, hammers, and torn and twisted bits of copper, brass and other metals, cannonballs and gun flints. Plowing through the débris, the robot came in contact with loose rock, seashells, squirming fish, writhing sea-worms, until I came upon what appeared like a crude iron chest, oblong in shape. My hopes began to soar as I lifted it into the sling-net, and looked about to see if there was anything else worth raising to the top.

"Take the net away!" I ordered into my phone, and followed with another to haul me to the surface also.

The winches wheezed and rattled; the dripping slimy cable reeled in over the schooner's side, and the sling followed. As the latter was swung over the bulwarks, it dumped the oblong object onto the deck; the little amount of encrustation left on the chest was snapped off as it fell from the net and opened up. It

spewed forth hundreds of metal discs, roughly octagonal in shape, heavy slugs, irregular round pieces-of-eight, a gold doubloon here and there, brown and discolored, but gleaming dull yellow when the patina was scratched away.

Had we discovered the resting-place of the *Santa Cruz*? No! For the authenticated records say, "*30,000,000 pieces of eight and other bullion in gold and silver plate!*"

We salvaged only the equivalent of four hundred thousand of such corroded and blackened discs—valued at approximately forty thousand dollars! However, we had our experience in the search for the famous Spanish galleon; and if the story of the *Santa Cruz*'s location is as authentic as the archives state, then our find was, without question, that of an unknown galleon which had possibly foundered in later years in these waters of Manta Bay.

It may well be that a handsome hoard still awaits the modern salvager lucky enough to strike the right spot in the same area of Manta Bay—if he has the equipment capable of penetrating to these depths. Our expedition did not recover the "*30,000,000 pieces of eight*," though our experience was not lacking in adventure, thrills and sport. We sailed away, en route for San Francisco; and no one complained, for after all, it is seldom indeed that a salvage crew earns forty thousand dollars for three weeks' work!

Saved by a Neck

This Australian transport pilot got out of a tough spot with the help of—an emu!

By KEITH DOUGLAS YOUNG

THE flying service I was working for has long since passed out of existence, absorbed by one of the larger airlines that took over the smaller companies' planes and routes. Planes used in those days were an antediluvian lot anyway, and were doubtless relegated to the scrap-heap by the new companies that bought them. The mainstay of the airline for which I worked was an old staggerer known as the DH (De-Haviland) 50, an old-fashioned, single-engined biplane capable of carrying

great payloads, though not at a very great speed as judged by present day standards. At any rate, ninety miles an hour is a good deal faster than the swiftest camel, and the small airline had prospered.

The routes covered by the company embraced that part of Australia containing the wild and forsaken desert of the Gulf Country. Another name for it is the Never-Never Land, and that's a title that meets with my approval. Anyway, I found myself flying over a

barren stretch of this territory in one of the old DH 50's, known to all and sundry as "The Hairy Goat." With me was Tommy—who was the senior pilot on this trip, and who had the controls. The plane was being tossed all over the sky by the terrific bumps caused by the hot air reflected from the desert's scorching surface; and sweat poured from Tommy's face as he corrected the savage drops with rudder and joy-stick. When I stuck my face from behind the windshield, solid chunks of oven-like air swept back in the slipstream and blasted me fiercely.

ABOUT this time we began crossing thousands of parallel sand-dunes caused by the wind, and running roughly north and south. Our course was a little to the west of north, and as we began crossing these dunes at an acute angle, I developed a splitting headache from watching them disappear under the port wing and slowly emerge from under the starboard. I tried closing my eyes, but there was some queer hypnotic attraction that impelled one to look. Tommy was suffering as much as I, and at last he kicked right rudder and the plane swung slightly northward and—merciful relief—parallel with the dunes. Our relief from this slight change of course was like that which follows taking off a tight new shoe. We advised no one of this unpremeditated change of course, for our antiquated ship was not fitted with radio.

Although from time to time we still encountered terrific bumps, flying was much easier on this new course, and we planned to swing back later and cross the dunes at right angles. For the next hour the flight was monotonous, and the plane swam noisily through the stifling heat radiated from the ground below.

I had begun to drowse off, when suddenly I was aroused back to full consciousness by the sight of small globules of oil flicking back from the engine and smearing my windshield. I sat up in alarm and looked at my instruments. A cold chill ran down my spine as I noted that the oil-pressure gauge was dropping back to zero, while the engine temperature was rapidly climbing to a point where a burst of flame would be the next warning. Tommy observed the danger at the same time as I, so he immediately flicked his switches off and we began a long, whistling glide that ended when we

landed and rolled to a stop in the midst of a barren wilderness. No sound disturbed the ghostly silence save the ticking of the cooling engine-parts, and the slight breeze that hummed through the struts and wires of the disabled plane. I sprang out and threw off the engine covers. As I had suspected, an oil-line had broken away from its mounting, and cracked almost through under the vibration.

Unless it could be repaired sufficiently for us to escape, it would have been a far better thing for us to have broken our necks in the dead-stick landing than to perish miserably from thirst. I dragged out the heavy kit of tools, but in the litter of spanners, pliers, wrenches, spark-plugs and pieces of wire, I could not find a single object that might serve to repair a cracked oil-line. I had fastened my handerchief about the crack while I rummaged through the kit, but the oil was still seeping through, so we discarded it and substituted a piece of rag torn from the tail of my heavy khaki shirt. It proved a false hope, however; for when the engine was re-started, the oil still dripped from the thick copper tube. We next tried a piece of airplane fabric torn from under the fuselage, but this too was ineffectual when the engine was run up to full revs—the oil still ran out onto the thirsty sand.

The blazing noonday sun was almost directly overhead, and we retired, baffled, beneath the wings of the plane to ponder on our none-too-bright chances of rescue. Searching planes would undoubtedly be out when we failed to arrive at our destination, but they would hardly expect us to be so far north. If anything, they would be searching to the south, in the direction of the prevailing wind. Any way we looked at it, it was a gloomy prospect.

SWARMS of voracious flies descended on us and began a maddening torture. Where they came from in that forsaken wilderness is a mystery, but our itching skin told us they were no mirage. I was dying for a smoke, but I was afraid to have one lest my thirst be aggravated worse than it was. To fight the flies off, and also in the slim hope that the feeble spiral of smoke might be glimpsed by a passing traveler, we decided to light a fire. When I had gathered an armful of stunted spinifex bushes and placed them in a heap near the plane,



we made the horrifying discovery that we were both out of matches. No matches meant no tea. Now, we thought, the situation is getting serious! We soon remedied this trouble, however, by taking a piece of discarded shirt-tail, soaking it in gasoline and lighting it with a spark from a bared wire of the plane's booster magneto. Of course, cigarette lighters come in a simpler form these days, but we got fire from our Rube Goldberg contrivance; and that, after all, was the main thing.

We had a small canteen of water and an even smaller package of sandwiches in the plane. Enough, we agreed, to sustain life for about three days; but certainly not much more.

The tea was like nectar to our parched throats despite the lingering tang of gasoline (I boiled the tea in a grease-can which I had first roughly cleansed with a few drops of gasoline) and the sandwiches put new strength into us. While I still felt a little refreshed, I determined to gather some more of the spinifex shrubs in preparation for a much larger fire that night. It gets devilish cold in the desert at night. I took a last smack at the flies and crawled from under the wing into the blinding glare of the sun. My wanderings in search of fuel took me to the top of a sand-dune, and I began to scan the horizon notwithstanding the fact that travelers in those parts were as scarce as pearls in restaurant oysters.

I looked in every direction of the compass, but nothing was in sight. I was about to give up in disgust when suddenly I spied a moving speck walking with a strange gait far to the south. I looked again. It was an emu, which could see the top wing of the plane and was coming to investigate with the insatiable curiosity of its species. Curiosity, as in the case of the cat, has

led to the undoing of many an inquisitive emu when it came too close to an aboriginal hunter who had purposely laid on his back and waved his legs in the air to attract it. I sprang down from the dune and ran back to the plane.

"Get your gun out," I said. "Here comes our supper and breakfast for the next few days."

Together we crouched under the wing and watched the slow, cautious approach of the ungainly creature. It seemed it would never get within pistol range. Nearer and nearer it crept, while we cowered in the shade and prayed it would not take fright. At last it stood motionless on a dune about fifty yards away. A perfect target! I saw Tommy's finger squeezing the trigger; then the emu crumpled up into a shapeless mass of feathers. Tommy ran off to see if the bird was dead while I sat on the ground and shook my head, for the gun had gone off in my ear and completely deafened me.

Tommy was saying something, but I could not hear him for the ringing in my ears. He ran to the tool-kit and rummaged through it until he found what he was looking for: A hacksaw blade. I went back to the dead emu with him, and watched closely as he began sawing the head off. He finally straightened up, bearing in his hands the emu's tough trachea, or windpipe.

"Here," he said. "Try this for size."

There's little more of this story to tell. I sawed through the cracked oil-line, then spliced it together with a short length of windpipe, which, by a merciful Providence, was an almost perfect fit. A few turns of wire round each end of the splice provided a repair which not only got us to our destination but was, I am certain, good for at least another ten thousand miles of trouble-free flying.

Readers' Forum

The Uses of Blue Book

For over twenty-five years I've been a BLUE BOOK addict. Through high school, college, and medical school, I seldom missed a copy. During internship it gave me the most pleasure, due to relaxation from the heavy strain.

When traveling, I always carry BLUE BOOK. It has ridden with me in ambulances, airplanes, troop-trains, convoys, and spent the night with me marooned in the snow. During seven months of recent maneuvers, I carried BLUE BOOK in my musette bag. It served, in addition to its other duties, as pillow, sun-shade, napkin, fuel, and other utilities. Need I say more?

My only criticism is too much of a good thing, namely Bedford-Jones. William Makin is one author I never tired of. Mill, Dwyer, Surdez, Brand, Grant, Jamieson are all top-notch men. How do you do it, at these prices? My advice is, "Lay off the murder mystery; keep it straight adventure." How about a contest to find the oldest regular reader?

William A. Moore,
Flight Surgeon
Sherman Field, Kansas

Keeping Up with the Times

BLUE BOOK's timeliness with its informative articles is really startling! For instance, in the April issue you give us a map on pages six and seven showing General Eaton's march across the Sahara right where one of the big battles of the present war is now being fought.

At a bridge-party the other afternoon the subject of the war in Egypt came up. I quite nonchalantly told of General Eaton's battle and six-hundred-mile march. Would you believe it—some of the guests didn't even know that Americans had fought in the Sahara?

You ask for letters of criticism; what I'd like to know is how in the world can one find anything to criticize in a magazine that not only keeps up with the times but in a great many cases is often way ahead!

Mrs. Elizabeth Vitale
Lincoln Park, N. J.

A Soldier Prefers the Past

The BLUE Book, by its editorial policy of presenting the best in a host of story possibilities, assumed an obligation: that of satisfying the service.

Does it do that? Here is one service man who feels certain that BLUE BOOK is the one magazine that fulfills that obligation. From the lowly yard bird to the highest officer, BLUE BOOK satisfies the service.

Perhaps more historical material would enliven the pages. We are all in the army now—we young ones, and a lot of the older ones; and the soldier would rather live with his literature in the past. The present furnishes

enough actual excitement—reading about it is apt to be anticlimactic.

Keep on satisfying the service!

Bernard Wrigley,
Fort Sheridan, Illinois

For a Non-belligerent Magazine

Having been instrumental in introducing BLUE BOOK to a number of my friends, I feel I have a right to make a complaint.

I gave you quite a send-off, stating in each case that BLUE BOOK was entirely different from any other magazine or publication.

Today every newspaper and magazine, (and the radio tossed in for good measure), is filled from margin to margin with past war talk, present war news and speculation as to the future outcome of the war.

I felt reasonably sure that we could always find surcease from this tiresome subject with BLUE BOOK. Imagine my chagrin of late, to find it sprinkled throughout with the words Fifth Column, spy, Nazi, war and sabotage.

Do your readers actually demand that you give them stories of this type? I doubt it!

J. R. Costilow
Pelly, Texas

An Old Thrill Renewed

Yesterday I had a strange series of adventures. The day was cloudy, and I stayed home, with a copy of May BLUE BOOK, my first.

Do you recall the times you first met Moby Dick? Or Long John Silver? Or hosts of friends in "The Talisman," "Ivanhoe," and other exciting yarns? Well, yesterday as I rambled through "Hag Gold," "British Agent," "The Man Who Couldn't Lose," I had the same sort of thrill. Here was adventure in a big, healthy way, and I have been missing it.

I dropped into a magazine store today and purchased back numbers to sort of make up for lost time.

Thanks heartily for putting out such a splendid book, with its fine array of lusty, well-told world-wide tales.

Howell Shepard
Los Angeles, California

*The Editors of BLUE Book are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.

REDBOOK - EXCITING NEW FICTION KEYED TO THE LIFE OF OUR EXCITING WORLD TODAY



"No Beauty Without Danger" on an island where strong men fight for a girl

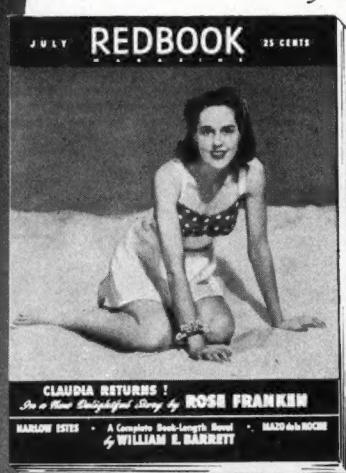
The girl had been blind, and she wanted to go home to the island she had never seen. Paul Nelman, pilot, didn't know that he was hiring himself out for trouble when he chartered his plane to her for the trip. But he found out soon enough—because there were other men on the island, and the girl was beautiful. Don't miss "No Beauty Without Danger"—50,000 words of bare fists and romance complete in July Redbook.

A COMPLETE NOVEL BY
WM. E. BARRETT

"CLAUDIA" who took New York by storm!

In spite of their bickerings, Claudia and David seem to be America's most popular young married couple. Redbook readers never get enough of them; the Redbook stories about them sell tremendously when republished in book form; and now the play "Claudia" is a big New York hit. All of which makes "Nice—and Silly," Rose Franken's newest Claudia story, the big news of July Red-

A new "Claudia" by **ROSE FRANKEN**



More July Fiction by

MAZO DE LA ROCHE **WHITFIELD COOK**
PHILIP WYLIE **HARLOW ESTES**
BRISTOL S. D. GROSVENOR



KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

This Sealed Book—FREE

Has life brought you that personal satisfaction, the sense of achievement and happiness that you desire? If not, it is your duty to yourself to learn about this rational method of applying natural laws for the mastery of life. To the thoughtful person it is obvious that everyone cannot be entrusted with an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of life, for everyone is not capable of properly using it. But if you are one of those possessed of a true desire to forge ahead and wish to make use of the subtle influences of life, the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) will send you A Sealed Book of explanation without obligation. This Sealed Book tells how you, in the privacy of your own home, without interference with your personal affairs or manner of living, may receive these secret teachings. Not weird or strange practices, but a rational application of the basic laws of life. Use the coupon, and obtain your complimentary copy.



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